UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN AN AGE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS: IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

by

BEVERLEY DEANNE LYSENG ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION
in
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN AN AGE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS: IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING** submitted by **BEVERLEY DEANNE LYSENG** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION**.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and administrators' perceptions and opinions regarding the effects of a revised district regulation of Edmonton Public Schools. This regulation, concerning communicating student growth, is referred to as HK.AR. The research questions were: how has HK.AR influenced pedagogy and student growth? what are the perceived effects of the regulation on teachers, administrators, students, and parents?

The research was conducted using a qualitative method. Information was obtained through a series of interviews with administrators and teachers in a select number of schools in the district. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data from six interviews were analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized.

The findings are organized according to the four stages of policy: development, implementation, impact, and review. A dichotomy of responses was reflected in the data. Each stage contains contrasting themes which emerged throughout the process of analysis.

Literature on educational policy, as well as assessment and reporting is discussed in relation to the findings and in light of the literature on educational policy and assessment reform. There is also reference to emergent literature on market influences in education, teacher efficacy and supervision, as well as student motivation. Conclusions and recommendations in response to the issues which were raised about the HK.AR policy are presented in the final chapter.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Problem

For many educators today, the call to improve assessment and reporting practices is growing. One of the many challenges facing school districts is how to implement assessment and reporting programs which will allow teachers to assess, evaluate, and report student growth in ways which are more reflective of students' understanding of curriculum.

Reports on students' achievements need to reflect the range of student growth, both academic and non-academic, and the information being generated by schools must be an accurate, effective, and meaningful communication of this growth. These beliefs are congruent with current waves of assessment reform in Edmonton Public Schools, as well as in other school jurisdictions throughout Alberta and North America. In the quest to improve schools, however, there have been many fleeting movements: whole language learning, portfolio assessment, and curriculum change, to name only a few. In order to ensure that the changes made in education are sound, and will not pass with the advent of the next educational trend, policies which require considerable changes in practice must be reviewed carefully.

In Alberta, the provincial government's Guide to Education: E.C.S. to Grade 9 Handbook (1994) states that all schools must report students' grade levels of achievement relative to the provincial curriculum (p. B4-3). This is done at the end of the school year for Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies from Kindergarten to grade nine, and provides information about the grade level of curriculum completed.

Consequently, this requirement has implications for teachers, administrators, students, and parents in the province. For example, administrators must ensure that teachers diagnose students' grade levels according to curriculum outcomes and report these for each subject area completed. As a result, many parents and students are provided with more detailed information about learning and growth and schools are more accountable to the public than ever before. While the list of learner expectations is not exhaustive, it has combined with other factors to create a climate in which new methods for reporting student achievement have become an integral part of school improvement plans.

In many school districts, revisions in local reporting policies have been initiated to provide students with more comprehensive information about their learning. In the Edmonton Public Schools district, concerns from parents regarding inconsistency in the transferability of marks and progress reports have resulted in the revision of an administrative regulation on communicating student achievement and growth. This revised regulation (Appendix A) is referred to as HK.AR[1] .

The original guidelines (Appendix B) required schools to develop plans to assess and communicate student achievement and growth. The revised regulation, however, requires that growth be reported according to "individualized plans for students based on individual levels of achievement." This implies that teachers diagnose and report students' grade levels, and that they also administer individualized student programs for multilevel classrooms. Consequently, the regulation has affected the way that many schools in the district now communicate student growth, as well as the way teachers teach. Advocates of assessment reform affirm that assessment and reporting practices should not only monitor student performance, but also improve it (Wiggins,

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[1] HK.AR refers to the location of the regulation on communicating student growth as found in the district policy manual. HK.AR is not an acronym.

1993; Stiggins, 1994).

In an attempt to facilitate the reporting process, many schools now generate computerised report cards. Teachers develop, edit, and revise comments for each of their students, according to learner expectations or outcomes. Furthermore, schools now administer the printing of progress reports, a task which had previously been supported through the district office. According to the revised regulation, this process must occur a minimum of three times per year.

However, there are varying opinions regarding the value of this reporting requirement. Some teachers and administrators find that the changes have resulted in more meaningful communication to the students and their parents. Others disagree, claiming that the result of the regulation is nothing more than increased time away from lesson planning and working with students. There are still others who question why there have been seemingly few reporting practice changes at the high school level when new plans have been implemented in many of the elementary and junior high schools throughout the district.

Indisputably, the implementation of HK.AR as a district regulation has affected teachers' and administrators' attitudes and behaviours within the schools. In order to ensure effective assessment and reporting practices, however, it is essential to monitor, and analyze, the implications of this policy, and its effects on teaching and learning.

To date, the Edmonton Public school system has no systematic information about administrators' and teachers' responses to HK.AR. The purpose of this study is to generate this information.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' and administrators' perceptions, attitudes, and concerns regarding the implementation and effects of a revised district regulation for assessing and reporting student growth, HK.AR, in Edmonton Public Schools. Particular emphasis was given to determining the implications of HK.AR for students, parents, teachers, and administrators from the perspective of teachers and administrators.

Definition of Terms

A definition on Edmonton Public School's computer web site differentiates between the terms "administrative regulation" and "policy." It states, "The board of trustees for Edmonton Public Schools establishes policies which guide the desired operation of the district. Through administrative regulations, the superintendent of schools establishes specific procedures for schools and central services to implement board policy" (http://epsb.edmonton.ab.ca/board/policy.htm). This definition serves to clarify the semantic nuances in the terms "regulation" and "policy."

This research also contains several terms pertaining to assessment. The purpose of these definitions is to establish a working vocabulary which can be interpreted by readers within a common framework.

Achievement:	demonstration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes students are expected to learn at a specified level
Assessment:	process of collecting information on student achievement and performance
Criteria:	guidelines, rules, or principles by which student responses, products, or performances are judged

Criterion-referenced:	tests and grading systems which use scores and grades based on achievement in subject matter
Curriculum:	statement of outcomes and expectations for student achievement; outcomes are the intended knowledge, skills, and attitudes students demonstrate as a result of schooling, while expectations are the knowledge, skills, and attitudes which students demonstrate at a specified grade
Curriculum Standards:	the expected student learning sequenced into grade levels against which student performance is judged
Effort:	demonstration of feelings and motivation for learning
Evaluation:	judgment regarding the quality, value, or worth of a response, product, or performance based upon established criteria
Grade:	level of achievement
Growth:	evidence of positive change in student achievement over time
HLAT:	acronym representing "Highest Level of Achievement Tests" developed by Edmonton Public Schools to measure students' level of achievement in reading and writing.
Mission statement:	a statement that presents the goals of a school or district
Norm-referenced:	tests and grading systems that compares a student's performance against the performance of many students
Outcome:	a goal statement specifying desired knowledge, skills and processes, and attitude to be developed as a result of educational experiences
Outcomes-based reporting:	reporting programs which focus and organize student information according to learning outcomes that all students are expected to achieve
Performance:	how well a student demonstrates grade level expectations

Performance Assessment:	process of collecting information through activities that require students to construct a response, create a product, or demonstrate a behaviour
Portfolio:	a purposeful collection of products and criteria for making judgments that exhibits to students, and others, achievement, and growth in the curriculum
Rubric:	a set of general criteria used to evaluate a student's performance in a given outcome area; a rubric consists of a fixed measurement scale and a list of criteria that describe the characteristics of products or performances for each score point
Task:	integrated series of activities that allow for a variety of responses to challenging situations, questions, or problems
Year-in-School:	the number of years a student has attended school after kindergarten

(Modified and adapted from the Alberta Assessment Consortium Handbook, 1997)

Research Questions

The fundamental questions which guided this research were: (a) How has HK.AR influenced pedagogy and student growth? (b) What are the perceived effects of the regulation on teachers, administrators, students, and parents?

The sub questions included: (a) How has HK.AR been implemented? (b) What are the strengths and challenges of HK.AR? (c) What are the side effects of HK.AR? (d) Has HK.AR improved inter-school transferability of report card marks? (e) How has HK.AR influenced assessment and reporting? (f) How has HK.AR influenced student learning? (g) What revisions or recommendations for change might increase the effectiveness of communicating student growth within the district?

Type of Study

This study involved qualitative data collection and analysis using ethnographic techniques according to the interpretive method of inquiry. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators and teachers regarding their perceptions of the implications of HK.AR on teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

Target Population, Accessible Population, Sample

HK.AR is an administrative regulation of the Edmonton Public Schools; therefore, all schools within the district having successfully implemented the regulation were considered members of the target population. However, the accessible population consisted of a total of fifteen schools, each of which was nominated by an administrative representative from district office. This population was further reduced to a final sample of three schools: an elementary school, a junior high school, and high school.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to a select number of administrators and teachers within the Edmonton Public school district who had revised reporting mechanisms according to HK.AR since the 1994-1995 academic year. For pragmatic reasons, students and parents did not participate in the investigation. The time required in involving parents and students would have been considerable since many would have required a great deal of information before being able to respond in a meaningful way. Generalization of the findings to other assessment and reporting situations is not attempted. Instead, sufficient detail regarding the implementation of HK.AR was provided so that the reader may assess the degree to which the findings of this study are transferable to other contexts.

Limitations

This study was exploratory in nature. Its focus was on teachers' and administrators' attitudes and behaviours, as well as their perceptions of the effects of HK.AR on students and parents. Because this regulation was an initiative of Edmonton Public Schools, the study was limited to teachers and administrators within this district. It must be understood that the participants of this study had been directly affected by the changes in assessment, evaluation, and reporting due to HK.AR. Therefore, they may have found it difficult to remain objective during the interview process. Moreover, some participants may have perceived this study as a covert evaluation of the revised regulation and, as employees of the district, may have withheld some criticisms. As noted previously, these issues were addressed through assurance of anonymity and full disclosure to each participant. According to the Guide to Education: E.C.S. to grade 9 Handbook (1994), grade level of achievement must be reported relative to the provincial curriculum for students from kindergarten to grade nine. Because this requirement does not apply to grades ten, eleven, and twelve, the information received from high school representatives was limited to those who had implemented HK.AR, but may or may not have reported grade level of curricular achievement. This information cannot be generalised to other schools in the district, or elsewhere. Teachers in elementary and junior high schools are accustomed to reporting grade levels of achievement; however, this does not mean that HK.AR has been fully implemented in all district schools.

Significance

To date, there has been limited systematic investigation regarding the effects of HK.AR on students, parents, teachers, and administrators. For this reason, this research was necessary to generate practical information for central office personnel who developed and implemented the revised regulation, as well as members of school communities who are interested in its effects on teaching and learning. Moreover, the information in this study may be beneficial to all those concerned with consistency in reporting student growth, including researchers and theoreticians who are following changes being made in assessment and reporting practices across North America.

The recent restructuring of education in the province has had a significant impact on the way schools operate. In order for government to direct resources more efficiently, it must have a clear understanding of what is happening in schools. The results of this study indicated unanticipated implications for the government of Alberta's Three Year Plan for Education (1994 - 1997). During one interview, for example, a school administrator spoke of increasing accountability in high schools due to recent changes made in government funding. For reasons related to such changes, this study was both timely and valuable for reviewing recent educational changes in order to assess current outcomes and develop future plans for the province.

The call to improve assessment and reporting practices in schools is indisputably growing. One of the many challenges facing school boards is how to implement programs which are more reflective of students' understanding of curriculum. Another challenge lies in resource allocation to schools. With government funding cuts in education and changes in the fundamental ways in which schools are funded, educators are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain an effective teaching and learning environment in todays' diverse classrooms.

Although results need to reflect a range of student achievements, both academic and non-academic, thorough consideration must be given to creating and maintaining high calibre assessment and reporting programs. Consequently, the information generated by schools must not only be an accurate and meaningful communication of student growth, but also, a cost-effective and practical way to enhance teaching and learning. These beliefs are congruent with current waves of assessment reform in Edmonton Public Schools. However, in order to ensure that the changes made are sound, policies such as HK.AR, which require considerable changes in practice and a great deal of resources in terms of time and money, must be reviewed carefully.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I discuss current trends in assessing and reporting student achievement, as found in the literature. In order to provide a context for this study, the discussion which follows outlines the rationale in support of more comprehensive assessment and reporting practices. Similarly, problems associated with traditional assessment and reporting practices are discussed. In addition, some of the difficulties involved in implementing new, more comprehensive assessment programs are also discussed. The final section of this chapter pertains to implications of alternative assessment practices and documentation regarding the revised Edmonton Public Schools regulation on communicating student growth: HK.AR.

The Rationale in Support of New Assessment and Reporting Policies

In response to public demands for increased accountability in education, assessment, evaluation, and reporting practices have become prime targets for improvement in our schools. Across North America, traditional models of grading and reporting student achievement are gradually being replaced or revamped. The rationale in support of new methods of assessing and reporting student growth is well documented (e.g., Airasian, 1991; Cross & Angelo, 1988; Ferrara & McTighe, 1992). The variety of assessment tools conducive to more comprehensive practices includes student exhibitions, performance assessments, computer simulations, open-ended tasks, investigations, journals, and portfolios.

Much of the rationale in support of alternative grading and reporting practices is based on the philosophy that good assessment should be a positive learning experience for students. Good assessment practices both reflect and respect student differences (Armstrong, 1995). Similarly, quality assessment and reporting should promote student growth, not hinder it (Wiggins, 1993).

In Assessing Student Performance (1993), Wiggins summarized his philosophy regarding assessment and evaluation. Based on his beliefs as to what assessment and reporting should involve, he assumed two postulates (p.36). First, that testing should be only a small component of assessment. Second, that student assessment should improve performance, not just monitor it. According to Wiggins, superior assessment alternatives are likely to result in a more positive learning experience for students. As a result, Wiggins' notions link current trends in assessing and reporting student growth with increasing student achievement.

Although most studies on student achievement have been conducted in the United States, both Canadian and American critics of public education have expressed concern over student achievement (e.g., National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Finn, Ravitch, & Fancher, 1984; Hirsch, 1987; Bloom, 1987; Bloom, 1994; Newell, 1996). However, according to Moses (1992), educators should use a variety assessment and reporting strategies which not only improve student performance, but respect students' individual needs and interests.

Numerous promoters of alternative assessment concur with Moses, having noted that prefabricated tests, which arrive along with textbooks, may not be ethically sound because they do not always respect students' intellect (e.g., Costa, Gardner, Stiggins, & Wiggins, 1991; Madaus, 1992). Documentation from standardized testing programs indicates that a great deal of money is spent to determine student achievement levels. Ironically, such tests are often not indicative of student comprehension (Wiggins, 1991). Wiggins postulated that clear achievement standards need to be set as reference points to target and document meaningful information about student growth. As a result, performance criteria based on models of outstanding performance need to be developed, documented, and shared (pp. 18-24).

Teachers have a professional obligation to critically evaluate the types of questions that they use to assess their students. For this reason, advocates of assessment reform place greater emphasis on what students can produce, as opposed to what they can "echo back" on paper in the form of tests, quizzes, and homework assignments which require minimal thinking skills (Stiggins, 1994; Ferrara & McTighe, 1992) . Tasks which assess what students can do are referred to as "performance-based assessments" (Berk, 1986; Priestly, 1982). Although performance-based assessment strategies can be traced back to the nineteen seventies and earlier, the literature on more comprehensive assessment practices has increased dramatically in recent years. The Edmonton Public Schools district regulation HK.AR (1994) is reflective of this trend. However, regulations such as HK.AR, which require that all teachers use a variety of techniques to assess and report the individual achievement of students, are not necessarily reflective of how educators have traditionally assessed the degree to which students have learned.

Problems Associated With Traditional Assessment and Reporting Practices

Considerable research shows that the climate created by an emphasis on grades, standardised testing, and evaluative mechanisms such as "pop" quizzes and simple multiple choice questioning makes it more difficult to know how well students understand. Hence, it becomes more difficult to help them along (e.g., Kohn, 1994; Stiggins, 1988; Wiggins,1993; Bracey, 1994). Standardized tests cannot measure children's creative thinking, oral expression, or interpersonal skills (Gardner, 1991). Yet, research shows that tests are useful for other purposes (Lytle, 1988). For instance, multiple choice tests provide teachers with quick, simple means of assessing students' levels of comprehension. Given increasingly challenging job requirements and restrictive time constraints, multiple choice tests are attractive due to their practicality. Moreover, inconsistencies from one teacher to the next due to subjective criteria such as neatness, spelling, and punctuation is reduced through standardised testing. For example, Herman and Winters (1994) researched the feasibility of portfolio assessments for large scale reporting purposes in Vermont. According to their findings, inconsistency in grading and reporting could be attributed to teacher bias (pp. 48 - 55). For this reason, caution must be exercised regarding the ways in which teachers assess and report student growth. If different teachers do not assign similar scores to student work, "then student scores are a measure of who does the scoring rather than the quality of their work" (p. 49).

However, advocates of more comprehensive assessment practices question the validity of some teacher generated tests and large-scale achievement exams. Although simple forms of testing and reporting may be convenient, current research cautions the use of any single technique for assessment purposes. Wiggins (1993) summarised the assessment dilemma as follows :

> There is no simple, either-or choice about what to test, how to test, and how to assess using tests. Instead, there are unending dilemmas. The challenge is to develop a picture of the whole person using a variety of evidence, including tests, and to do so in the most feasible and helpful (to the student) way. One of the many dilemmas is that [standardized] testing so easily becomes nearly the entire assessment system instead of

> being a facet of it: [standardized] testing is, after all, quicker, cheaper, neater, and cleaner. (p.23)

Just as there are problems with a surplus of tests, quizzes, and one answer assessments, there are challenges to implementing more innovative approaches, especially when assessment and reporting methods are not balanced with a variety of other techniques.

In Alberta, large-scale standardised testing is increasing. In June 1995, for example, the province of Alberta increased testing in an attempt to make schools more accountable to the public. Previously, students in grades three, six, and nine wrote one province-wide standardized test each year; the subjects varied. However, students in grade three now write tests in Math and Language Arts. In grades 6 and 9, students write tests in Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies. Furthermore, school results are published in local newspapers and available on request from each school.

Implementing New Assessment and Reporting Techniques

Maeroff (1991) maintained that educators must continue to explore, develop, and implement more diverse methods of assessing student growth. Furthermore, teachers must challenge students with interesting and complex assessment tasks. "Enhanced multiple-choice questioning" is one method of alternative assessment which is recommended by Runte (1996). He purports that enhanced multiple-choice questions challenge students to perform complex tasks using a variety of strategies, while providing teachers with a simple, effective means of assessing student learning. If greater creativity is required of students, however, it will be required of teachers as well.

Research highlights the importance of teachers being able to assess progress in ways which will not only lead children to demonstrate that their work is of high quality, but will also encourage them to keep improving it (Wiggins, 1993; Stiggins, 1988). This explains why a great deal of the literature on more comprehensive methods of assessment is intermingled with literature on reporting student achievement to students and their parents. The literature on reporting student achievement, however, is considerably less extensive.

According to Seeley (1994), "to be meaningful, grades must be interpreted by all members of a school community in the same way, and educators must keep records of them in ways which lend to communicating a more complete understanding of each student's progress" (p. 23). In other words, sound assessment and reporting practices must complement each other while, at the same time, demonstrate respect for students and the ways in which they think. Seeley wrote about the dilemma some mathematics teachers faced regarding the implementation of more meaningful assessment and reporting programs in urban middle schools in the United States. In a longitudinal study over several months, she found that the teachers, in spite of the difficulties encountered, were changing the nature of how mathematics was taught. Moreover, changes in the way teachers assessed and reported student achievement resulted in a heightened awareness of students and their learning. Like a domino-effect, improving practices became a major focus for many schools. According to one teacher, "if we go through all the work of changing, and the only result is a more complicated way of coming up with a grade, nothing much will be accomplished" (p.6). Seeley found that there were many difficulties in implementing changes, and cautioned those revising assessment practices to be mindful of the need to provide support to teachers so that they are able to effectively implement new reporting programs. "Teachers need assistance to ensure that they are not swept out to sea in the process.... The challenge remains for teachers – with the support of their districts, their professional organizations, and the educational measurement community – to devise grading systems that adequately reflect this shift" (p.6).

Regarding HK.AR, teachers in Edmonton Public Schools have witnessed considerable professional development in the area of assessing and reporting student growth at the school and the district level. A vast number of workshops and activities, documented in the district professional development calendars (1994-1997), bears witness to this fact. Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence reveals that the regulation has been implemented in some schools much more successfully than it has in others.

Implementation of the Regulation

Of pertinence to this study were the conditions which permitted some schools to successfully implement HK.AR. Miklos (1991) suggested that the success of policy implementation strategies varies depending on the nature or type of policy being implemented (p. 153).

In analyzing policies and structures for post-secondary education, Nussbaumer (1977) found that policy changes were implemented most effectively in areas which were perceived to be problematic for the organization. Nussbaumer also found that the time required to implement those changes fully seemed to be about five years. As the first draft of HK.AR was introduced in September of 1994, Nussbaumer's conclusions may explain the apparent delay in the degree of implementation throughout some district schools.

As noted by LeTourneau (1981), delays appear to be characteristic of policy implementation (p. 217). In a study focussing on the establishment of a French language teacher training institute in Manitoba, LeTourneau identified several factors that could be attributed to the successful implementation of the program: (a) the existence of objectives and standards, (b) the creation of a specific agency to administer the policy, (c) the effective allocation and use of financial resources to support the implementation process, (d) the development of a supportive network of individuals, including the enlistment of politically influential allies, and, (e) the hiring of personnel committed to the policy. Although given only minimal attention, the social, political, and economic context in which the process took place were also considered factors which contributed to the successful implementation of the plan (p. 221). LeTourneau's study had important implications for administrators as one of the factors found to be indicative of successful policy implementation was administrative commitment. He explained, "commitment and discretion on the part of administrators... facilitates the process by ensuring that the course followed is in keeping with the objective of the policy" (p. 239). These findings are pertinent to understanding the factors and conditions which may have permitted the successful implementation of HK.AR in Edmonton Public Schools.

Through the years, a number of studies have suggested that policy analysis and implementation are influenced by many factors and conditions (Dror,1968; Dye, 1975; Dunn, 1981; Carter & Hall,1995). For this reason, outcomes are complex and difficult to predict. Accordingly, Fullan (1982) indicated that educational change is contingent on the "multiple realities of people who are the main participants in implementing change" (p.82). More recent studies such as Eltis and Laws (1993), and Crump (1992), also showed that competing and differing expectations from a variety of interest groups make school leaders' work subject to assorted inefficiencies. Duncan (1985) noted that "the practice of policy analysis does not permit the use of universally applicable theories or generalizations" (p. 38). Likewise, my own study is not grounded in policy analysis concepts or models, and the results are not transferable to other schools (see Introduction, Chapter Three, p.7).

To conclude this review of policy implementation, it is useful to refer to the work of Hall and Carter (1995) who advocate for the development of more systematic ways of approaching change. While acknowledging the critical nature of the implementation process, they propose shifting traditional ways of thinking about how this has been done. Through comparing and contrasting policy implementation processes in Europe and the United States, they determined that effective change strategies required attention to some essential areas. Consequently, they identified the following aspects of implementation that policy makers should consider: (a) increased deregulation; (b) multiple approaches to policy development and implementation; (c) incentives to award innovative ways of thinking; (d) a balanced, systemic approach to the allocation of resources, time, and attention to all phases of the change process, including program development, implementation, and evaluation; (e) a move from a vertical, "top down" way of developing and implementing policy, to a horizontal, "grassroots" approach to enhance the involvement of practionners.

Implications of Alternative Assessment and Reporting

At present, few universities in North America require education students to complete a measurement course. Rogers (1991) noted that of 33 Canadian universities, only 25 *offered* at least one measurement course, and eight offered none (p.186). A survey of these universities revealed that most teachers did not complete a measurement and evaluation course. Research findings suggest that teachers are not competent in student assessment and that teacher education programs do not provide adequate training in assessment techniques (Dauncey, 1986; Barringer, 1990; Gullickson, 1990).

Cornett (1995) suggested that problems of subjectivity in revised reporting practices might be better addressed within teacher training programs that have a greater focus on assessing and evaluating student work. In this way, teachers would be provided the means to enhance existing assessment and reporting methods and student teachers at the university level would be better equipped to deal with the wide range of reporting practices now being implemented. Cornett indicated that changes in assessing and reporting student growth have implications for both teacher training and teacher supervision:

> Today, teachers and the schools themselves, are being held more accountable for student progress, a departure from the 1980s when teacher accountability was measured by written tests and on-the-job evaluations.The implications for teachers,educators, school districts and schools involve collaboration. Schools and colleges must work together to prepare and assist teachers (p.30).

She adds that teachers must be assured of an environment which allows for flexibility and experimentation: they must be inserviced in not only the rationale, but the practical techniques for procedures such as inter-rater reliability, computer-generated outcomes-based reporting, and individualised programming. Ultimately, the implications of such training will be more statistically reliable results. This is critical given public relations issues related to educational accountability and teacher credibility.

According to Sperling (1994), the practical applications of new assessment and reporting policies must not be neglected or left to be interpreted by individual teachers who find it difficult to manage all that they currently face (pp.10-13). Teachers faced with time constraints often find it difficult to to teach, let alone assess students and record a tremendous amount of information (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1992). Subsequently, the literature suggests that there are implications for administrators: teachers should be provided with the time to talk to and observe individual students as well as to discuss strategies and problems with colleagues. Administrators need to provide for these needs through listening and acting on what works best for teachers and students.

A significant pattern in the literature on assessment, evaluation, and reporting, is that these terms are referred to in the same recurring order, suggesting that one naturally follows another. However, this is misleading. It is my belief that teachers must be able to assess, evaluate and provide feedback about student growth interdependently, allowing the learning the process to continue uninterrupted. This postulate has both similarities and differences when compared to the work of Bloom and his colleagues (1981), and Frisbie and Waltman (1992), who claimed that grading and reporting are not necessarily essential parts of good instruction (Guskey, p. 14). Referring to "checking" as assessing and "grading" as evaluating, Bloom, Madaus, and Hastings (1981) affirmed that teachers need to check (diagnose and prescribe) regularly how students are doing and what difficulties they have experienced. They found grading and reporting (evaluating and describing) to be much removed from this process. Likewise, alternative methods of assessment, evaluation, and reporting student growth will be of little use in improving current programs unless educators understand the importance of the interdependent nature of these practices. In any case, a wider range of quality assessment and evaluation practices will result in more frequent and meaningful communication between the home and the school.

Research in human psychology indicates that anxiety increases change is experienced. At present, information regarding HK.AR is random and fragmented. Many teachers question whether the effort demanded by this new form of reporting is worth the time commitment required. Some feel that there is too much emphasis given to assessment and reporting and that this has affected the amount of effort they can provide for instructional activities (lesson planning, corrections, assisting students) and non-instructional events (clubs, sporting events, student exchange programs).

Contemporary Policy in Alberta: Assessing and Reporting Student Growth

The original reporting regulation for Edmonton Public Schools encouraged progress reports to be "designed to enhance students' feelings of self-worth" (District Policy Manual, 1991, HK.AR). Consequently, many comments related to effort and personality were generated. Little was reported about learned curriculum outcomes. As stated in the Guide to Education: E.C.S. to Grade 9 Handbook (1994):

> In the past, the reports provided to parents have not always identified clearly the student's achievement, and in some cases the problem is reflected in the reporting format. Report cards that identify the group in which a student is placed, but do not indicate the student's actual achievement, should be reviewed and revised. (p.B4-3)

HK.AR has resulted in substantial changes at the district level, the most notable of which is the wide array of professional development activities related to enhancing and communicating student achievement. At the classroom level, assessing and reporting student growth according to achievement indicators and curriculum outcomes has taken primary focus. Although these practices are reflective of the administrative direction of Edmonton Public Schools, they echo a trend occurring throughout North America. As Kleinsasser, Horsch, and Tadstad (1992) affirmed at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association in Atlanta, Georgia:

> Classrooms are moving from a testing culture – where teachers are the sole authority, students work alone, and learning is best done for the test to an assessment culture – where teachers and learners collaborate about learning, assessment takes many forms for multiple audiences, and distinctions between learning and assessment are blurred. (Seeley, 1994, p. 6)

Evidenced by requests from parents for more consistency in results from one school to another, subjectivity in assessment and reporting is an issue with which Edmonton Public Schools continues to struggle. According to Dr. Emery Dosdall, superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools, the quest for more meaningful information about individual student growth is at the heart of the very existence of HK.AR: "A review and revision of the regulation was initiated in the fall of 1993 to address parental concerns with respect to the diversity that existed in communicating student growth and achievement within the district." (November, 1995) As Guskey (1994) noted, communicating student growth has always been a challenge for educators, especially since "what educators think is important, may not be what parents think is important" (p.14).

Summary

The Edmonton Public School district is at the leading edge of innovation, having introduced one of the first district-wide assessment and reporting reform initiatives in Canada. Despite years of research, however, the information available on assessment and reporting is very scattered. Furthermore, there is no evidence to indicate that one grading or reporting method works best under all conditions and in all circumstances.

The impact of HK.AR on teachers, administrators, students and parents needs to be researched in order to understand how student achievement can be further enhanced by an effective assessment and reporting system. The information generated by this study will result in a more comprehensive picture of the effects of this regulation on teaching and learning, and in what ways it is accomplishing its purpose. The results of this study will also help to refine and extend current understandings as reflected in the literature. In investigating the implications of HK.AR, I will identify areas which are perceived to be enhancing pedagogy and student learning, as well as those areas which need to be modified. This will make the reporting process more clearly understood and more meaningful for all.

Chapter III: Method

In this chapter, the methods used to answer the research questions will be discussed. First, I describe the research design used for this investigation. Next, I describe the sample, and review the methods for collecting and analyzing the data. Third, I present the strategies for addressing trustworthiness which were considered in order to enhance the credibility of the study, as well as the related issues of reliability and validity.

Research Design

The intent of this study was to gain information about HK.AR, an Edmonton Public Schools administrative regulation on communicating student growth, and to develop an understanding of its effects on teaching and learning. When little is known about a phenomenon, and the intent of the research is to gain insight into the phenomenon under study, the choice of research method should be a qualitative one (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Since little is known about the implications of HK.AR for teachers, administrators, parents, and students, and the effects of the regulation on teaching and learning, it is appropriate to use qualitative methods.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose an approach to theory construction whereby the researcher discovers concepts through a process called the constant comparative method. Through this approach, they advocate theory generation, such that data collection occurs simultaneously with analysis. The results are called "grounded theory" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) because concepts are grounded in the data through a process where hypotheses are continually tested against new data. Hence, in conducting this research, theories were generated through the discovery, development, and verification of data which was systematically collected and analyzed.

Of course, most research is not based purely on one design. Approaches to theory design according to interpretivists such as Geetz (1973) were also utilized to guide this research. As opposed to making hypothetical generalizations about a topic, interpretivists view the goal of theorizing as a means to provide an understanding of the "lived experience" of participants. Interpretive scholars, for example, "...consider that every human situation is novel, emergent, and filled with multiple, often conflicting meanings and interpretations. The interpretivist attempts to capture the core of these meanings and contradictions" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.19).

Whether grounded in data according to themes that emerge, or generated through interpretations of conflicting meanings, qualitative research design is an ongoing process. In summary, the essential design considerations must be broad so as to encompass issues such as the compatibility between the research purpose, the selected design, and the existing theoretical framework with which the researcher is working (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Sample

All sampling was done with a purpose in mind: to investigate the implications of HK.AR according to the perceptions of administrators and teachers in schools which had successfully implemented the regulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this technique as "purposeful sampling". Likewise, participants in this study consisted of six administrators and six teachers: two administrators and two teachers from each grade level grouping–elementary, junior high, and high school. Participants were selected according to their level of experience with HK.AR. This non-random procedure is known as a "convenience" sample (Rudestam & Newton,1992).

Participants were selected according to two techniques: directly, through a reputational technique, and indirectly, through "snowball sampling" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Congruent with the reputational technique, an administrative representative from the district nominated twelve schools with reputable programs for assessing and reporting student growth. For ethical reasons (e.g. to maintain anonymity), I further reduced this group to a total of six schools which, accordingly, were administered by principals reputed to have effectively implemented programs to communicate student growth. In snowball sampling, initial participants were asked to identify others. Hence, to facilitate the selection of a second participant at each school, each administrator nominated a staff member who was perceived to be knowledgeable about HK.AR, and who was perceived to be assessing and reporting student growth effectively.

To notify candidates that they had been selected to participate in this study, a representative from Edmonton Public Schools sent an information letter to each school principal (Appendix D). Approximately one week later, these same principals received a follow-up letter. This letter allowed me, as the researcher, to introduce myself, reiterate the purposes of my study, and notify them of the estimated time commitment required (Appendix E). Three weeks from the date that the initial letter was sent to schools, candidates were contacted by telephone and asked whether or not they wished to participate in the study. All individuals who were contacted through this process participated. Subsequently, a schedule of priming questions (Appendix F), and a consent form (Appendix G), were mailed to each school principal and representative staff member prior to an interview.

Data Collection

Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted, each lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. Questions were derived from, but not limited to the initial problem statement. Furthermore, questions were open-ended to permit flexibility and a wide range of responses. Depending on the need for further clarification, a second interview was conducted. The second interviews varied from 5 to 30 minutes. All comments were audio taped and transcribed verbatim.

Overall, the information obtained during the second set of interviews, at each level of elementary, junior high, and high school, was considerably more comprehensive than that which was obtained from the first set. This can be attributed to the fact that, as an interviewer, I had the opportunity to refine my skills during the first set of interviews. At the second school at each level, I was able to ask appropriate questions, at opportune times. The information became repetitive after approximately six interviews. Due to a lack of constructive information, therefore, transcripts from six follow-up interviews were not suited to prolific analysis. For this reason, only those interviews conducted at the second school, at each level, were used for data analysis. This greatly facilitated the selection process.

Initial interviews were conducted at a time and place mutually convenient to both the informant and me. All interviews took place in a quiet location in the school. All but one of the second interviews – which was conducted in a face-to-face setting at the school – were audio-taped telephone conversations, on consent from each participant. The time allotted was not always sufficient to complete the schedule of interview questions during our first session.

The main intent of the first interview was to develop rapport, discuss the research topic, and uncover salient information pertinent to the implications of

HK.AR. At this time, the consent form was signed. This form indicated that confidentiality would be maintained, that the participants could refrain from answering any questions, and that they could withdraw at any time throughout the study. In order to facilitate a thorough exploration of each experience, I used a set of guiding questions (Appendix H). As my experience with interviewing increased, relationships among concepts within the data were identified. Consequently, the depth of the questions increased as I proceeded from one interview to the next (Appendix I). For qualitative studies such as this, the naturalistic inquirer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) must be careful to consider issues as they emerge during the period of data collection and recording. As I became increasingly aware of my responses, verbal and nonverbal, as well as the responses of the participant, my behaviour as a researcher improved. Although this self-awareness was somewhat uncomfortable to manage in the beginning, the uneasiness decreased with experience. Consequently, this process enabled me to identify the most salient issues. Likewise, I was able to more effectively respond to pertinent points as they arose, and to investigate new salinities as they emerged.

To maintain confidentiality, and thoroughly familiarize myself with the data, I transcribed and checked each transcript with the audio-taped interview for accuracy. All interview comments used for citations, as well as explanations of the context in which they were made, were sent to the participants for verification to clarify, enhance, and validate the data. Participants were asked to make corrections, and to return the revised version to me in a self-addressed envelop which was included with the information.

Most follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify something discovered on analysis of the original data. Due to the nature of these secondary interviews, the required information was specific, and questions were considerably less open-ended. After having completed the pilot interview, for example, I realized that I had not asked for a written copy of the schools' philosophy. According to HK.AR, the cover of the reporting document had to state the district mission statement. However, some schools had also developed a school mission statement. Therefore, when I telephoned the principals to ask about this information, my questions related solely to the school mission statement. The schools' reporting documents were a pertinent source of data, and subsequently, needed to be an essential part of the data collection process. These documents were particularly helpful as they contained information about the assessment and reporting practices at each location that was not necessarily explicit in the interview data. Subsequently, the interview schedule was modified to reflect this.

Although interviews were tape-recorded, I also used handwritten notes to record key words, or observations. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are many advantages of handwritten notes:

> ...taking them forces the interviewer to attend carefully to what is being said; the interviewer can interpolate questions or comments (including notations about nonverbal cues) onto paper without the respondents' awareness, the notes can be easily flagged for important items to which the interviewer wishes to return later; the interviewer need not rely on his memory to compose the all-important summary that should be provided at the end of the interview. (p. 272)

Likewise, ! found these notes particularly helpful during data analysis as they recorded incidents which I may have otherwise overlooked or forgotten.

Data Analysis

The methods for data analysis used in this study are based primarily on the grounded theory approach. According to this approach, "data are systematically coded into as many themes and categories as possible. As the categories emerge, and are refined, the researcher begins to consider how they relate to one another and what the theoretical implications are" (Rudestam & Newton, 1992, p.36). This is a cyclical process: the researcher focuses on exploring areas revealed by the ongoing analysis and emerging issues. In this study, coding was primarily directed by issues that were uncovered during each interview. Hand-written notes were used to guide this process, capture salient issues, and make corrections to each interview schedule or transcript as required. As the interviewing continued, questions or gaps in the data emerged. Follow-up interviews were conducted when this occurred. Hence, the new information was gathered, and used to supplement the initial data.

Shortly after each interview, I verified that the audio-taped recording was audible and complete. I processed and reviewed all transcriptions myself. Data were stored on a computer disk, and back up copies of all files were formulated. Subsequently, each cassette, disk, and file was dated and labelled. A code, consisting of a number and a letter, was used to indicate the name of the school, and the identity of each participant. Although coding occurred simultaneously throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I did not begin to transcribe audio tapes until all participants were interviewed once. The first interview, however, was treated as a pilot study. Therefore, it was transcribed immediately. This process enabled me to refine my interview skills as I progressed.

Data analysis of transcriptions involved several steps. Once the audio tapes were transcribed into print form, transcripts were coded for reference purposes. For example, numbers in the left margin were indicative of the school. Letters indicated whether the participant was an administrator (A) or a teacher (B). Each line in the transcript was numbered to facilitate data retrieval during the coding process. Numerical coding facilitated referencing throughout the process of organising the interview data according to categories and themes that emerged.

For this study, a combination of both inductive and deductive techniques was utilized. In this way, all of the data could be categorized for more in depth analysis. In developing the interview schedule, for example, I was able to group the questions into one of six major themes related to the problem statement. Initial themes included educational background, familiarity with HK.AR, implementation of HK.AR, strengths and challenges of HK.AR, influences of HK.AR on teaching and learning, and recommendations for change. Before beginning analysis, I created a color coded key for each theme. Interview data were grouped into categories according to each theme color. Consequently, I began highlighting those elements which were physically present and countable. Berg (1995) refers to this process as "manifest content analysis" (pp. 176-177), a method of data reduction based on predetermined themes. In this study, themes were initially deduced from the research problem. However, this process resulted in a great deal of data which could not be placed in a predetermined category. To categorize the remaining data, I began writing notes in the margins of each transcript. With a minimum of three independent examples of an emerging idea, I created a new category. From these categories emerged new themes.

Ethical Considerations

In participating in this research, individuals may have found it difficult to answer some of the interview questions, or, initially, to partake in this study at all. As a researcher, I recognize the importance of ethical considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity, and full disclosure. Consequently, in conducting this study, I took care to reflect on how participants would perceive the research problem, as well as associated risks or difficulties involved.

In the introductory letter to participants, risks and benefits for contributing to the research were fully explained. Prior to each interview, research procedures were reiterated, written consent was obtained, and participants were informed that they could opt out of the study at any time. After all interviews were completed, it was explained that any quotations used as citations would be sent to each participant for verification and approval, and that full anonymity would be maintained. Furthermore, participants were informed of their right not to respond to anything with which they were not comfortable. Each person was encouraged to ask questions or share concerns. On several occasions, personal contact information was provided: in the introductory letter, immediately on completion of the interview, and on verification of the research findings.

In recording the findings, referencing of the participants was facilitated through the use of pseudonyms. To ensure accurate referencing of participants, a key was created and updated as needed. This was kept in a secure place.

Despite all of these precautions, I sometimes found myself in a conflicting role. As both a researcher at the university, and a teacher with Edmonton Public Schools, I had experience with the implementation of HK.AR in both of these capacities. At the same time as I was involved in the implementation process of the regulation in a district school, I commenced my research work at the university. Hence, I assumed the role of a participant observer quite surreptitiously in the beginning stages of my work. Consequently, I had to take care not to influence data due to personal bias. In conducting interviews, care was taken not to skew the data through questions or comments which may have altered answers, or inferred that one answer was preferable to another.

When conducting research in the workplace, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) warn that "dangerous knowledge" can result in "ethical and political dilemmas" (pp. 23). However, because HK.AR is an administrative regulation of the Edmonton Public School Board, all participants were district employees. Therefore, to minimise any problems arising from sensitive information, tentative findings and drafts were checked with other sources of data (notes, reporting documents) and shared with each participant. Upon his or her consent, this information was shared with a district representative for subsequent analysis and feedback. Furthermore, data from only six of the twelve schools for the sample were used in the findings. This method of data verification, is known as triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Although taxing at times, these techniques greatly enhanced the credibility of the study.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is considered essential for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, trustworthiness is a general term concerned with the degree to which the data were grounded in the constructed reality of the participants. A variety of measures were taken to control factors which may have threatened the credibility of the findings.

Member checking. Member checking refers to the process of verifying interpretations of data with participants to validate findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To facilitate this process, initial findings were shared with participants and feedback was encouraged. Furthermore, citations were described in context and sent to the participants for verification.

Triangulation. In comparing the findings with other sources of data, as described previously, the credibility of the study was further enhanced. This strategy, referred to as triangulation, required on-going hypothesizing. The process also included comparing and contrasting data sources (written documents, notes, interview transcripts), clarifying findings with participants, and verifying results with an objective source.

Selection of participants. The method of selection increased the credibility of the research findings. Participants were selected on the basis of their expertise with HK.AR. Subsequently, information was based on the perceptions of educators who were reputed to have a thorough understanding of the regulation.

Instrumentation. As discussed previously, both the development and pilot processes of the instrumentation contributed to the credibility of the findings. Initially, relevant literature was consulted to determine salient issues. Because the research questions were addressed through semi-structured interviews with each participant, interview questions were grounded in the central focus of the research problem (Rudestam & Newton, 1992), and verified by authorities in the field.

Dependability

Similarly, dependability refers to the accuracy of research, or consistency, of the findings, and is essential for credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the consistency of responses was determined through a variety of measures. During interviews, I paraphrased what was said in order to clarify ambiguous phrases. Furthermore, on completing data analysis, findings were shared with participants to ensure accurate interpretations of content. Categories and themes, as determined through coding of the data, were shared with an objective source to verify inter-rater agreement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In conducting this process, similar phenomenon were uncovered, suggesting that there was a fair degree of consistency in the findings.

Of course, there is no single technique which can fully guarantee the credibility and dependability of data. Techniques which enhance trustworthiness vary, depending on the nature of the research problem and the rigour of the researcher.

Summary

Since little is known about the implications of HK.AR and the effects of the regulation on teaching and learning, a qualitative research design was selected for this investigation. Using the constant-comparitive method, data collection occurred simultaneously with data analysis. Theories were generated from an interpretivist perspective and tested as the data emerged. In order to enhance the credibility of the study, strategies for addressing trustworthiness were considered and actions were taken to reduce error. The findings of this study are grounded in the constructed reality of the participants and, therefore, cannot be generalized to other settings. However, sufficient detail about the policy process was provided so that the reader may assess the degree to which they are transferable to other contexts.

Chapter IV: Findings

In this chapter, I present the results of the data analysis. In order to better understand how HK.AR influenced pedagogy and student growth, I have chosen to use grounded theory methods to explore the perceived effects of the regulation on teachers, students, parents, and administrators from the perspectives of a small group of teachers and administrators.

The process of data analysis uncovered a number of categories and themes related to the fundamental research question. However, the impact of the regulation on teaching and learning is a contentious issue: the data reveal two conflicting perspectives. On the one hand, some respondents believed that the HK.AR regulation may have enhanced teaching and learning. On the other hand, other respondents believed that teaching and learning has been either unaffected by the regulation, or that the regulation has had a *negative* impact on teaching and learning. In some cases, this difference in opinion exists within the same school. Remarkably, one principal challenged the need or value of the regulation while a teacher in the same school was a steadfast supporter. This conflict occurred throughout the data in relation to the effects of the regulation on students, parents, teachers, or administrators, or the impact of the regulation on teaching and learning.

I found also that the data contained patterns that related to the 4 phases of the policy process: (a) policy development, (b) policy implementation, (c) policy impact, and (d) policy recommendations. Each phase contains categories representing each point of view. The findings are therefore presented in four corresponding sections.

Policy Development

Analysis of the data revealed a difference in the understandings of participants about how HK.AR was developed. A description of these findings follows. Categories are combined with themes to exemplify any similarities or contradictions.

Shared Decision Making.

Shared decision making is an approach that suggests that participation in decision making should involve input from each of the stake holder groups. The findings reveal that there are two perceptions regarding the development process of HK.AR. Some respondents explained that the HK.AR regulation was the result of discussion amongst administrators, teachers, and parents over a period of time. Other respondents thought that the policy was centrally mandated. They were not sure of the origins of the regulation and they expressed feelings of "bombardment."

The next two categories contain statements from participants which illustrate each of the these points of view.

Input from principals. According to Grant, who is a principal, the development of HK.AR required a considerable amount of participation from principals. He noted, "The good thing about HK.AR is that it was one of the first documents that had massive input from principals." Grant viewed the policy development process as a collaborative one, where input from district principals resulted in the revision of the original regulation on communicating student growth. Similarly, he thought that the development of the regulation invoked a considerable amount of discussion amongst principals. Accordingly, this may have resulted in a trickle-down effect for teachers, students, and their parents.

Alphie, a teacher on Grant's staff commented,

> I think it has made us work harder at learning how to communicate with each other. I think it's made us look at how we're communicating as well [from] the home to the school, the school to the home, teacher to teacher, school to school...

A plan which evolved. Grant also described the policy development process as one which evolved over time.

> As a principal, having a lot of input into the document, and knowing the input that was received, ... when it suddenly became policy, we didn't like it as much any more as a group. It's an interesting evolution that when we like something as a group but then it becomes something that we all want to hold each other accountable for, sometimes we have more trouble with that.

Grant, himself, had substantial involvement in developing HK.AR. This experience had, naturally, influenced his understanding of the regulation. Furthermore, Grant described the experience as worthwhile. His initial involvement with the development of the regulation may have substantially influenced his feelings. Consequently, this is a consideration when reviewing the findings because it could indicate the difference between a negative or a positive interpretation of the effects of the regulation.

Centrally Mandated Policy

Marcia, also a principal, viewed the policy development process quite differently. She stated,

> The way HK.AR came in was [with]...not a lot of discussion from schools...Now, HK.AR is slightly different in that we probably did need something. But boy, the power that came through that one was pretty powerful...

Given the importance of the regulation, Marcia said she was particularly surprised that the development process involved so little participation from teachers, administrators, parents, and students. She stated, "You've got to be careful when you bring in policies...how you talk to people about them...allow the schools the options...". Richard, a high school teacher, indicated that the district should have provided more support for schools given the fact that most teachers were required to considerably adjust traditional assessment techniques in ways which complemented the district regulation. He stated,

> There needed to be more in-servicing, by the district, with schools. I think that the teachers should know what HK.AR is. And they really don't. I think that what they've tried to do is to give it some teeth without making it too confining.

Richard was formerly a junior high school teacher in a school where there was a considerable amount of involvement and support for the regulation. In comparison with the changes that had occurred at the junior high school level, he contended, district high schools had not been been as affected by HK.AR as schools at the elementary and junior high level. Referring to the principal of his past school, he stated,

> ...Martin was fully committed to it, and I was fully aware of it, and the teachers were fully aware of it. I think we will be too, with our new system. I think it's in place here. But, like I was saying...the high schools are...third to come on stream.

Richard also suggested that the regulation development process was vague. He stated, "I get this sense of aimlessness". Other participants expressed the same concern.

Nebulous origins. Joan conducted her own investigation of the development of the regulation. Surprisingly, she indicated that the origins of HK.AR were initially misunderstood by district personnel, including some of the consultants who were introducing the policy to district schools. She also suggested that HK.AR was *contrived* to look as if it had been developed by Alberta Education, rather than district personnel.

> I'm not sure of the reasons or the philosophies behind that, but... ...they... said, "Good, we can use that as a vehicle to get what we want. We can say to people that this is what Alberta Education is demanding." I suppose I could get crucified for saying this but I really don't care. It wasn't from Alberta Education. It was from Edmonton Public as a bit of a lever to get what they wanted.

Notably, Alberta Education produced an appendix to the Guide to Education: E.C.S. to Grade 9 (1994) at approximately the same time as the inception of HK.AR. This appendix was the result of recommendations based on a study by an MLA[2] task force. After having interviewed people around the province, the task force recommended that grade level of achievement be reported for all students from kindergarten to grade nine. However, Marcia believed that the grade level requirement from Alberta Education was reinterpreted by officials from Edmonton Public Schools to mean something more.

> That was one small wording that came from the province. What we took from that one small sentence, we expounded on it and blew it all up to mean something else. I was there when Barb Mitchel, from the province, explained where this came from and what it means. She said she was not sure why everybody was getting so concerned about it...As teachers, of course, we knew it was a big deal. But then came HK.AR , to not only

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[2] MLA is an acronym meaning "member of the legislative assembly"

> solve that particular problem, but a multitude of other things... The province made one statement, and we made it into a whole other thing.

According to Marcia, teachers questioned the origins of the regulation as well.

> When I started to explain the meaning of HK.AR... people started questioning things. They wanted to know things like: When did this come through? How come we didn't have input into it? We do this at budget. Well, you know how much input goes into budget: staff, community, students...

Marcia believed that the board trustees were willing to follow the beliefs of the district administrators, and that the trustees may not have been particularly concerned with HK.AR because they had other priorities. She stated, "They're concerned that we're following the provincial curriculum, that we're safe places to be, that we're working on achievement." However, she was perplexed about the policy development process.

> [A]s I went around trying to talk to teachers, although I would try not to influence them by saying that this is good or this is not good, the big questions that came were: Where did this come from? Why did this come? Who did something wrong that we now have to pay for this? And I don't know. Those answers I don't know. And if you talk to anybody, you may never find this out. Who did this come from? Why was it necessary? ...to be honest with you, I don't think I asked anybody myself, other than my associate at the time.

Marcia, like Joan, suggested that the policy development process appeared to be less than participatory, involving little collaboration from parents, teachers, students, and school administrators. However, Marcia believed that the policy development process was hasty, and for this reason, included few school representatives.

Fast-tracking. Marcia stated, "The way HK.AR came in was quick...It's like the way [Higher Level of Achievement Tests] came in, quick...." She was particularly concerned about the impact of the policy on teaching and learning. She suggested that some schools had to eliminate excellent programs due to HK.AR. Likewise, the policy did not reflect the beliefs and practices of some schools. As an example, she explained that her staff were challenged to implement the Highest Level of Achievement Tests (HLATs). These standardized tests were not developed by the district as a corollary of HK.AR. Nevertheless, they are an integral part of recent assessment and reporting-related changes in the district. HLATs are given to all students enrolled in grades 1 to 9 of students at the end of the school year. Teachers facilitate the testing process: they complete all corrections within the school, assess and cross-check individual levels of performance for students, and subsequently return information about the results to central office administrators. The process requires a considerable amount of time, the value of the results, she thought was questionable.

These comments exemplify the considerable discrepancies among the perceptions of principals and teachers as to how the regulation was developed. However, the processes of policy development and policy implementation are closely related. Consequently, the same discrepancies are evident in the data pertaining to how the regulation was developed, as well as how it was implemented in schools throughout the district.

Policy Implementation

The role of the administrator was perceived to be another element which influenced the implementation of the regulation. In three of the six sites visited, HK.AR had had a considerable presence. In these schools, the teachers interviewed seemed to be knowledgeable about HK.AR and familiar with comprehensive assessment and reporting practices. Moreover, elaborate computer systems had been purchased by each of these schools to further enhance their schools' reporting plans. The fact that these schools are also presided over by administrators who support the regulation is an interesting phenomenon. This must be considered when analyzing the experience of the participants and the degree of implementation of the regulation in the schools.

Policy Reaffirms School Practices

Administrators who were extremely supportive of HK.AR noted that their schools were already meeting many requirements of the regulation before the policy materialized. For this reason, according to Grant, HK.AR was a reflection of what teachers at Jackson School were already doing.

> Well it's interesting in the sense that I felt that HK.AR...is far more a response to what we were doing, than it was a document that caused us to do certain things. Maybe we could say that we were ahead of the game somewhat, but we were already working on a lot of the sections, or characteristics of a good progress reporting system before HK.AR came out. When the document actually came out, it was simply a reaffirmation and we had to do very little changing in our progress reporting.

In Grant's school, few changes had to be made to the reporting document itself. He described them as "minor" items, including adjusting the first page of the report card to reflect the school's reporting schedule, and revising the school philosophy statement. These changes did not appear to have impacted the day to day practices of the school substantially.

Reinforcing standards. As administrators, Marcia and Deenie also noted the amount of attention they paid to the technical requirements of the regulation. According to Marcia, "I went through the document and listed all the things that we needed to have. Do we have the date, the attendance, those kinds of things. Those are the things that we're working on here." Of Springfield High school, Deenie commented, "The only thing that is missing right now is ...student days absent...." However, she suggested that reporting grade level was not mandated for high schools. Oddly, this contradicted what was recorded in the regulation. Clause B-3 stated, "Teachers shall communicate to students and parents the grade level of curriculum for each course in which students are enrolled and plans for student programming." According to Deenie, it was not necessary to report grade level of achievement at the high school level, despite the fact that HK.AR stated otherwise. Although she did not appear to know how to report this kind of information at the high school level, she said that she would have attempted to do so if it were mandated. She explained,

> Ten, eleven and twelve though, even within the district, have been left off that list....How do you report grade level? Like, for example, when you have Math fourteen... If a student is in Math fourteen, the grade level is grade five or six... As I recall it, the end of that discussion was that high schools would not be reporting grade level... I don't know how this is going to be tackled in high schools. I haven't had any direction on it yet...

The district policy to report grade level is required, at present, for schools from kindergarten to grade nine. Although High Schools are not required to report student grade levels, HK.AR has increased similarity in reporting practices in schools throughout the district. According to Joan, it provides "[uniformity] to the reporting format for schools that are using report cards... some conformity." Similarly, Alphie found that the regulation created a standard format for reporting practices from one school to another. In particular, he found that the regulation "standardized the language" that teachers use to report student growth. Parents are given information about achievement that is common with the type of information which is made available from other schools throughout the district. He stated, "Even though the cosmetic look of some of these things is different, the basis for reporting and evaluation standards are the same. So there's more meaning, more transferable information." Conversely, however, other participants both believed that HK.AR has not provided standards for transferability of student achievement information. They commented on the challenges of interpreting student information pertaining to achievement. According to Deenie, the situation intensifies as students progress from elementary, to junior high, to high school. She stated,

> ...we've got students here from...eighteen different junior high schools...you can find a wide variety between their marks...an "A" in one school and the amount of knowledge that student has might be quite different from an "A" in another school...the same ability type student.

Consequently, inconsistency in assessment and evaluation practices and standards from one school to another has resulted in a range of marks which are open to interpretation. For this reason, many participants claimed that HK.AR has done little to improve transferability of marks: although teachers may assess student growth according to curriculum objectives and outcomes, they may interpret levels of achievement very differently. Similarly, Grant suggested that performance standards need to be developed. He stated,

> We have to get at the business of what performance standards really mean...it's a difficult one, and not one that's going to happen overnight... we need to know the difference between a 70 and an 80, and we need to be able to agree on those...teachers do this number crunching thing that they believe constitutes validity...that's not the case. It especially doesn't mean validity if it is not based on curriculum outcomes...

He anticipated that the next phase of HK.AR would include the development of criteria to foster a common understanding of standards.

A need to move forward. Of the three principals interviewed, one stated that the regulation had been implemented at the school level before it became a district policy. According to Grant, HK.AR affirmed that assessment and reporting practices at Jackson School were congruent with the district philosophy. Because the school had already gone beyond the requirements of HK.AR, the regulation acted as a catalyst, and encouraged teachers to move forward. He explained,

> With our HLATs...and the auditing process we've done, we're able to see that teachers are anywhere between 80 to 100% in agreement on grade as a level of achievement...when we start talking about performance within that grade, the statistics drop to about 60% ...that diametrically opposes the concept that we know the difference between 83% and 82%. I'm not so sure that as teachers we know the difference between a 70 and an 80, versus a 71 and a 72. So those are the kinds of questions that need to be asked...HK.AR is helping us ask those questions.

Grant also believed that HK.AR encouraged teachers and administrators to ask more meaningful questions in terms of future endeavours in assessment and reporting. He found that the district's Highest Level of Achievement Tests contributed to this revelation. By starting with the end product in mind, Grant and his staff discussed what the progress reporting system needed to look like. Although Grant described the process as "backwards," he felt that the staff had adjusted to progress reporting in a meaningful way, one which was reflective of their collective beliefs. He said, "We connected our beliefs back to evaluation, then to assessment, curriculum, and finally, back to teaching and learning." He was perplexed, however, by the reactions of teachers at some schools. He remarked,

> Unfortunately... schools...were submitting to the regulation versus looking at it in terms of good sense in progress reporting... the main purpose of which is...to enhance student achievement. Yes, it's an accountability document, but if we're doing it because of accountability alone, that's a very poor reason to do it...I'd like to...take the next steps...in terms of improving student achievement.

The compliant attitude displayed by some of Grant's colleagues may be another factor contributing to varying degrees of implementation of HK.AR throughout the district.

Causal relations: Issues and Challenges

All participants claimed that the regulation caused them to reconsider their beliefs and practices about assessment and reporting. Some schools have experienced a significant shift in assessment practices and made substantial changes to their reporting plans. The impact of these changes will be discussed in the next chapter. This section, however, features statements from teachers and administrators which exemplify the contrast in the attitudes of participants about the process of policy implementation.

"Fit" with established practices. Grant and Richard considered the regulation to be a reflection of what was already happening at their school. Consequently, they considered themselves to be quite unaffected by the HK.AR policy implementation process. When questioned about the implementation process of the regulation, they said that there wasn't one. In comparison to other schools, Jackson School had already developed a comprehensive assessment and reporting plan before HK.AR became official. As a result, teachers were familiar with curriculum-based reporting long before HK.AR became a district policy. In contrast, however, Marcia and Joan suggested that the regulation had not only forced them to reconsider their personal beliefs about teaching and learning, but had limited the schools' ability to offer some services. According to Marcia, for some schools, entire programs have been eliminated in order to implement HK.AR and corollary district initiatives in assessment and reporting such as Highest Level of Achievement Tests (HLATs). Marcia described a situation at Niwa school where teachers were particularly frustrated with HLATs. These reading and writing tests were implemented in 1995 from grades one through nine in all schools throughout the district. The tests were created to familiarize teachers with holistic scoring methods and foster greater consistency in teachers' assessment of grade levels of achievement. HLATs are written towards the end of the academic year. As a result, groups of teachers meet at this time to discuss, administer and evaluate HLATs. According to Marcia, the energy and time required to determine a grade level of achievement for each student was enormous. In fact the HLAT process forced Niwa to abandon its program for assessing reading and writing.

Although the school assessment program at Niwa had been successful, it became redundant when HLATs were implemented. As a result, teachers' motivation and commitment to enhancing assessment practices decreased. She explained,

> Niwa school had a tremendous program...they had...an assessment tool that they had developed all themselves. It was a remarkable program where all the kids at the school went through a process... Do you know what happened?...It went out. Do you think there's one teacher in that school that enjoys HLATs? Not one. So when it came in, their...system had to go out. Yeah, they had to... no choice. The wonderful system they created...gone. Are they happy teachers? No. Did they have something great? Yes. Measurable? Yes. Was it throughout the district? No. So, there's your trade off.

To ensure that HLATs were helpful for teachers and students, Marcia believed that the implementation process should have been more gradual, with a only a small number of schools set up as experimental sites before involving the entire district. She said that the staff's reaction to HLATs had been influenced by the implementation process which has been set by the district. She commented, "I think it might have been much more positive if HLATs were brought in and implemented on a per school basis." Marcia believed that a gradual plan for implementing HLATs may have inspired teachers and schools to initiate a self-directed approach to alternative assessment and reporting practices. She was wary of HK.AR because the regulation decreed not only how teachers were to assess students, but how they were to teach. She stated,

> With HK.AR, you don't have a choice. You **need** to get involved because how you teach is...spelled out for you...It's the most powerful

> statement our district has made about how you're going to teach in a classroom, which is different than we've ever done before...We never got into the "how" before...Most policies are a grey line, and we **love** them grey. HK.AR is not ... grey ...This is much more specific than anything else that I've read.

Deenie expresses a similar concern about the regulation. For example, she said that comments made by other administrators about computer reporting programs led her to believe that they required a tremendous amount of time, energy, and resources. When combined with HK.AR, which requires schools to report grade levels of achievement and curriculum-based information and the HLAT process in May and June, she believed that many teachers were challenged to find time to spend with students because they were so busy assessing and reporting. This concern was expressed by another teacher who said, "We're so busy weighing the sheep, that we forget to fatten them." For this reason, Deenie delayed the implementation of a computerized student reporting system at Springfield High. She stated, " We, in this school, haven't sat down and said, 'Let's go through this regulation and make sure we are doing it all correctly' just because I feel we are...meeting the needs of our students."

Marcia thought that the policy would have been thoroughly supported if it had been more open to interpretation. She stated, "At the district level, we have to be very careful about how we implement [policies]. We have to keep [them] grey." Marcia affirmed that strength of the public education system lies in the differences of each school. She disliked the uniformity that some regulations require. For example, the requirement of HK.AR to include personal information on a child's report card, although seemingly innocuous, was a particular concern for her. She claimed that the district requirement to include a child's name, address, and phone number on a reporting document would not be appropriate in some schools. She explained,

> If that piece of paper is taken, that child is at a risk...there are many families in high needs areas that are in safe homes...you don't want the child's name exposed. So again, it's very difficult to make a generalized rule without specifics coming into it.

Marcia also said that these kinds of requirements restrict her in her role as a principal. Because HK.AR is mandated by the district, however, she felt obligated to verify that the school's assessment and reporting practices were congruent with the policy. Joan supported Marcia's concerns. Moreover, she suspected that some school groups had unknowingly introduced extraneous reporting elements due to misinterpretations of the regulation. She mocked, "Sometimes you have to knock people over the head and say, 'No. It doesn't mean that it **has** to be this. It could be anything from this extreme to that extreme.'" Apparently many teachers believe that computer reporting systems were mandated to be used in schools throughout the district. This is not true. Joan believed that people had interpreted the regulation differently from one school to another, and that their interpretations of HK.AR had not always been accurate. She stated,

> I guess I'm concerned more with the interpretation of the regulation than I am with the regulation itself. The interpretation of the regulation has been...that we're all supposed to do the same thing. We're all supposed to do marks. We're all supposed to have descriptors. We're all supposed to be extremely similar.

Despite the fact that many schools have purchased elaborate computer systems to record and report student growth, there is no reference to computerized reporting programs in any district policy. However, myths about the HK.AR policy may also be a contributing factor to the varying degrees to which the regulation has perceived to have been implemented in schools throughout the district.

Adaptive processes. The regulation has been implemented more fully in some schools than in others. As aforementioned, the attitude of the administrator contributed to the degree of implementation of the regulation at the school level. As a result, both Grant and Alphie's support of HK.AR has had a positive influence: a concentration on assessment and reporting as tools which can enhance student achievement was evident at Jackson School. In fact, Alphie remarked that the fundamental activity of his job as the school's curriculum coordinator was focussed on the development, implementation, and review of comprehensive assessment and reporting programs and techniques. He stated,

> I work with implementing curriculum in terms of how it is taught as well as how it is assessed...[I work] with teachers to develop some of their assessment practices...coordinate, at the grade nine level, the year end assessments...and work with administrators here to redraft...fine tune and change our reporting practices and our reporting documents...."

At Jackson School, the assessment climate was decidedly achievement driven. This was evident in the comments that both Grant and Alphie made which reflected a shared philosophy that comprehensive assessment and reporting was key to enhancing student growth.

Similarly, but conversely, one administrator's point of view had a negative influence on the degree of implementation of the policy throughout the school. Joan described the implementation process at MacDonald School. She stated that Zigfried, the former principal, had not wanted to implement new report cards when HK.AR appeared in draft form. Her comments revealed that she supported Zigfried's decision. She stated,

> Zigfried blocked...that. He knew...that he wasn't willing to change so I think he fought that battle...rather than give it to the staff to try and worry about...which was a smart way to go because if he lost the war, then he'd come back to us and let us know at that time, as opposed to giving us information as we went along and having us think that we had to change... I guess we're OK [now]. Marcia is adding some of the other stuff that we did not have, things such as the mission statement, and other stuff like that...she's bringing us into line....

Zigfried was able to successfully impede the implementation of HK.AR. As determined by the district, the deadline for complete implementation was set for the beginning of the 1995-1996 academic year. According to Joan, this hadn't been a concern while Zigfried was principal at MacDonald School. Consequently, however, in February of 1997, Marcia was still revising the school's reporting plan to accurately reflect the requirements of HK.AR. Once more, the attitude of the administrator is shown to have significantly affected the implementation process. Because Zigfried had managed to waive the requirements of the HK.AR policy, the school was behind in the implementation process when Marcia arrived as the school's new principal.

Both Grant and Alphie commented that, initially, they had difficulty deciding how to implement HK.AR at Jackson Middle School. However, this had been a challenge for administrators and teachers throughout the district. As Grant stated,

> I think that everybody struggled with this to some degree....I think everybody struggled with some of the same questions as well. For example, nailing down grade as a level of achievement...I doubt I have the faintest idea of how to do that...as an administrator, I don't know how to teach my staff to do that....

Moreover, he said that teachers were experiencing the same kinds of dilemmas. For example, Grant asked, "What do I do when I don't agree with last year's teacher at the end of June who put down grade seven, and I'm seeing this kid now in grade seven and I'm reading him at grade five level?" The implications for professional development have been numerous as teachers, administrators and consultants struggled with the mechanics of implementing the HK.AR policy. The result has been a "steep learning curve" for many school personnel as they deal with the ramifications of grade level reporting using curriculum based criteria. Alphie explained that the HK.AR policy made administrators more aware of the need of curriculum monitoring. He stated,

> It made administrators more aware not just of the stuff that's taught, but the whole realm of what we do in school. I find it very difficult to implement this if you don't know. How can you report on a student's progress if you can't clearly see where the continuum is, and where the students are in relation to that. So if I don't know the whole development of students' skills in social studies and I have a student in grade seven that isn't able to deal with the grade seven curriculum, how do I report on that student's achievement level if I don't know the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that have to be developed...Where will I know to drop that child to in terms of his ability, and how will I know in terms of where to start? How will I ever pick him up and bring him along?

Evidently, teachers were also uncomfortable with diagnosing, stating, and justifying students' grade levels. Initially, as Alphie explained, HK.AR was threatening for teachers who were not convinced of their ability to diagnose grade levels for individual students.

> It was a scary proposition to implement those HK.AR regulations... because, as teachers, we're the first people who have to state [the grade level], and we're the last person that [parents and students] see. So we're the ones who have to explain it, even though we don't necessarily have the background about where the child has come from, and we certainly don't have all the answers.

Alphie said that there were so many factors to consider that teachers and administrators had difficulty deciding where to begin.

At Jackson School, however, the implementation of a comprehensive assessment and reporting plan was accomplished through stages. Grant explained, "We started with the curriculum and from there we went to assessment, then to evaluation and standards, determining grade level and performance standards, and from there to progress reporting." At Jackson School, the implementation process was a gradual one, occurring over a period of five years, and remains ongoing. In fact, Grant considered HK.AR to be the beginning of a much larger initiative in assessment and reporting. He stated,

> I think that really HK.AR is not the end, HK.AR is just the beginning. In our school, we're taking another step next year, to realign the reporting system to something entirely different from what we have now. The closest I can get to describing it would be that curriculum, assessment, and the progress report look exactly the same...are ongoing, and are on demand, and are tailored to meet the demands of parents and students

> in terms of the kind of information that they want...

Grant envisioned a process without progress reporting periods where reporting reflects an individual's growth, instead of a school template. Accordingly, Grant expected that the reporting process at Jackson School would look very different for students as procedures were revised to reflect the needs of the school and the community.

In contrast, however, teachers at Springfield High School had been working on implementing HK.AR within departments. Consequently, teachers had been discussing assessment and evaluation within subject area groupings. Deenie explained that the staff had not attempted to work with HK.AR as a school initiative, but that work had definitely happened within departments as teachers tried to implement more uniform assessment activities for students. She explained,

> The Science and Math departments, in particular, because the assessments they are using has been quote "varied and quite uniform"...in the Science ten classes we're not having one teacher do just a little bit, you know, the minimum amount of assessment, where another teacher is doing three times as much and using different strategies. Common exams...common assignments. I think that the instructional strategies will vary as a result in both Math and Science.

Deenie believed that these efforts were reflected by the superb achievement results that students had scored on the provincial exams. However she did not attribute this achievement to the HK.AR policy as she explained that this was a ten year recurring pattern in Math and Science results in the history of the school. However, she stated that the English and Social Studies department teachers, in the past five years, had put a lot more into the area of assessing and reporting and that this had been beneficial in terms of achievement results. According to Richard, the implementation of HK.AR was delayed at Springfield High due to technology considerations. He commented,

> Getting all the technology in place...has delayed us...until the Spring, if not until Fall. The administrators have spent the year investigating all the...reporting systems out there...I see things in progress, it's waiting for all the technology....

This same sort of comment was also identified by Deenie.

Evidently, HK.AR had influenced schools in a variety of ways. In the case of the schools highlighted for the purpose of this study, each one illustrates a different approach to assessing and communicating student growth. Consequently, the impact of HK.AR on educational practice varies depending on the school's approach to assessment and reporting.

Policy Impact

The findings on policy impact are presented in two sections: Part I deals with effects of HK.AR on teaching in select schools in the district, Part II presents findings as to how HK.AR has influenced learning in selected schools in the district.

Influence of HK.AR on Teaching

Participants identified several implications of HK.AR which are influencing pedagogy. Once again, however, an incongruity exists in participants' perceptions regarding the impact of HK.AR on teaching conditions and practices within district schools. For example, according to some participants, an increase in the knowledge and skills of teachers is considered to have improved programs. Moreover, those participants described a higher level of accountability from schools to the learning community. Presumably, these factors enhance student achievement. In contrast, however, other participants expressed concern about the impact of the regulation on daily classroom activities. These participants stated that decreasing resources had created an environment in which teachers were challenged to provide students with quality learning opportunities. Consequently, HK.AR had negatively influenced student achievement.

Professional Capacity

Alphie indicated that, overall, HK.AR had a positive influence on teaching. The regulation had provided teachers with a challenge and, consequently, had enhanced their "professional capacity." He emphasized the term "professional capacity", stating,

"...**professional capacity**, not **professionalism**, because that's a different term. It's more a measure of how we handle what we do." Alphie explained that HK.AR provided a stimulus for teachers to grow professionally, as it did as for students to grow academically. He stated,

> Whenever you introduce a regulation, it's always looked upon as a threat in the beginning. I think that this regulation, however, is not so much a threat, as it is a challenge. We can no longer afford to remain static as teachers. So it's made us...change as well.

Alphie's experience with HK.AR at Jackson School indicated that teachers were assessing and reporting student growth and achievement in much more detail than ever before. As a result, he affirmed that HK.AR had had a positive impact, not only on the school, but on the teaching profession itself. He stated, "It **looks** like we know what we're talking about. It **looks** like we know what we're doing, because we're demonstrating that we do. It's taken away some of that mystery, and it's much more open."

Alphie thought that the commitment to the HK.AR policy was, politically, a wise decision by the administration. It had raised the public's awareness about what was happening in district schools. He cautioned, however, "I don't want to sound like that's the only reason for it, because I don't think it is."

Knowledge and skills acquisition. All participants indicated that HK.AR had forced teachers to use the curriculum more extensively. In order for teachers to assess and report student achievement using curriculum based indicators and outcomes, they had to be very familiar with them. According to Alphie, teachers not only have to be skilled in teaching students – they now have to *demonstrate* their skills to parents and the general public. HK.AR requires that teachers use a variety of assessment strategies in order to meet the individual needs of students. Therefore, teachers have to be more knowledgeable about different kinds of assessment tasks. As teachers become familiar with the variety of assessments that they can use, students have more choice in terms of demonstrating their growth. Alphie explained,

> Previously, there was only one way, and that was to sit down with a pen and paper and you had to show your stuff. And unfortunately, if you didn't read well, it didn't matter how much scientific knowledge you may have had, you didn't perform well.

Consequently, HK.AR resulted in a focus on professional development in techniques such as performance-based assessments, scoring with rubrics, and differentiated learning for a variety of individual learning styles and needs. For this reason, Alphie thought that methods for gathering information about students greatly improved.

As previously indicated, many teachers gather information about student growth using computer marks programs. The number of teachers who calculate student averages using pen and paper is decreasing due to computer software programs such as "Classroom SIS" and "Mac School." Accordingly, teachers who have had no prior experience with computers are now witness to a growing requirement for technological knowledge, as well as pedagogical expertise. With schools implementing computerized programs for reporting purposes, teachers are being forced to work with computers, regardless of their preference.

Accountability. Several participants stated that HK.AR increased the accountability of teachers in that they were required to know each child's needs in detail, and provide a program to meet those needs adequately. Richard discovered that, at the secondary level, HK.AR created a need for teachers to work as a team. He explained that teachers at Springfield High met in departments to plan strategies for assessment and to ensure that tasks were not repetitive from one grade to another. In this way, each grade level teacher contributed to the learning continuum in ways which made teachers accountable to one another. He explained how the process works.

> As a department we meet and we know that they have to do an argumentative essay so in grade ten we make sure that they start with a basic position paper. We get that skill down and we consider that they are at grade level for grade ten. At grade eleven, the position paper has to be more extensive, stating the other side of the issue as well. So we plan, and set goals in our departments. That way the Social Thirty teacher just has to refine and hone the skills that they already have. Before, we were kind of ignoring that in grade ten, eleven, and twelve. It was an awful big chore for a grade twelve teacher. So we have in our mind where they have to be for each grade level.

Alphie agreed that HK.AR established an accountability factor stating, "I think at any school, regulations are put in place to look at the end product, or to look at how you report an end product...." He believed that the policy increased the accountability of teachers in terms of not only what content they addressed, but how they addressed it. Consequently, it made some people more aware of the importance of aligning what they taught in the classroom with what was reported to parents in terms of progress and achievement.

However, teachers were not the only people who experienced an increase in their accountability to others. HK.AR increased the accountability of school administrators to the teachers they were supervising.

In this connection, for example, Alphie affirmed that the regulation helps administrators identify areas of individual teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, HK.AR can be a tool for administrators to assess what is happening in terms of curriculum content covered by teachers as well as the pedagogical expertise of each individual. This includes a range of activities: strategies for challenging students who are above or below grade level, accurate assessment of student growth and one's ability to deliver a learning program which is appropriate for each child. Subsequently, the regulation enhances the ability of administrators to monitor teachers for whom they are responsible. As Alphie explained,

> It increases...accountability for monitoring the curriculum, for monitoring curriculum implementation, and for looking at assessment practices...for...clearly communicating the growth of students...so there's increased accountability all the way along....[including] knowledge of strengths, staff areas of need, and...it made administrators more aware....

Deenie and Richard also recognized that HK.AR could be a tool to help administrators identify effective and ineffective teachers. According to Deenie, "If a teacher isn't doing an adequate job in those areas, you'd have the power of the regulation to say that they must be doing the following...as a minimum...."

Impact on Classroom Activities

In contrast to the preceding category, which highlighted factors thought to enhance student achievement, this one concentrates on the concerns of participants regarding the impact of the regulation on teaching. Two themes emerged from the data: resources and teacher innovation.

Resources. Several participants expressed frustration with resources. More specifically, they referred to the lack of resources; both human and financial. The concern expressed by all was the challenge that teachers faced in implementing detailed assessment and reporting plans. Of primary interest was the enormous time required to do so.

Many participants felt overwhelmed by the workload involved in accessing curriculum, comparing and contrasting outcomes and indicators with individual student's work, assessing student growth and levels of achievement, and, finally, reporting this information. Frequently, teachers were required to use computer programs which were unfamiliar; many teachers and administrators were not trained in computer technology. Richard noted that this is changing as teachers are forced to use computers in order to access their electronic mail, record information about student growth, and supervise students as they conduct research using technology in the library or in their classrooms.

At Jackson Middle School, parents liked the curriculum-based feedback. However, they also expressed concern about the time required by teachers to report growth in this way. The school used a computer program which was developed by the district to report student growth. Grant explained,

> Parents like...the personalization. They like...that...somebody knows their children...well. They like the anecdotal comments...The...concern that parents have, and it's a justifiable one, is the amount of teacher time that it takes for teachers to complete these anecdotal reports. Their question is that it's nice that the report cards are personalized, but is there another way that ...takes less time and energy for teachers...that...still provides a similar kind of information for parents?

For Grant, the time factor was a substantial concern. However, he did not think that this was as much a result of HK.AR as it was of the process that the teachers were using. The school reporting system, although technologically advanced, required a great deal of teachers' time. In terms of financial expenditure, computerized reporting is a costly service for schools to provide. According to Grant, the requirements of HK.AR can be met through a very different process than what was being used at Jackson School. Therefore, Grant said that the reporting process is often a topic of discussion among teachers, parents, and students.

For Deenie, the lack of resources could be attributed to a variety of conditions that directly affect the classroom situation. He stated,

> It is...a lack of...resources. In my own line, that means teacher time, teacher ratio, and...technical skills. There must be a computer program...that allows us to put a lot more detail out....if you have the skills to do it, and the time to do it.

Furthermore, if extensive computer reporting systems are over-extending teachers' limits, the results can have a negative impact on student achievement. She stated,

> If you listen to [people in] schools that have got extensive reporting systems, or a different format of report card, and the time that they have to actually dedicate to creating those report cards; it is a tremendous draw on their own personal resources....If you have exhausted teachers in the classroom, not able to spend enough time preparing lessons and teaching good lessons, that has a negative impact on student achievement, eventually.

Deenie considered a simple report card to be sufficient, as long as students receive ongoing and consistent feedback about their learning. Her opinion about HK.AR and curriculum based reporting using computer programs was quite definite. She did not consider the policy necessary. She stated, "If you're in the classroom, giving lots of feedback...you're probably more than meeting that need...the report card that comes out is simply a summary of how the students have done on that." Furthermore, Deenie believed that the transition from simpler report cards to ones which are more comprehensive takes teachers away from working with students. She explained,

> Teachers are all working hours just to prepare that information. The reality is that teachers don't have that time...I'm a real pusher of teachers serving students. That's recognizing the reality of time for my teachers. But I've never been a regulations person, so part of it is me.

She added , "If [a] kid is...getting lots of feedback from his teacher in terms of [his understanding of a concept, I think that is more of the key...[rather] than trying to create a "Readers Digest" version of a report card." Although she was speaking from the perspective of a high school principal, Deenie had worked as an educator at each level of schooling – elementary, junior high school, and high school. She expressed that her philosophy might change depending on the grade level of the child.

Joan's comments reflected a similar concern about teachers and the amount of time required to produce comprehensive reporting programs in some schools. She felt sorry for teachers like those at her daughter's school who were creating curriculum-based report cards, using portfolio assessments to communicate student growth, and conducting interviews with students and their parents. Joan expressed concern for those teachers because the workload was much more than it needed to be. The work was redundant. She explained,

> The report cards go home, but it is expected that you go to a conference as well. That's a...step in the right direction...But I would not want to be doing both...report cards and portfolios. [Portfolios] in themselves are a tremendous amount of work, and then you have these twenty minutes of back to back conferences with some thirty or more kids [and parents]...How much time do you spend getting ready for them? Thirty hours? That's a very conservative estimate. It's a lot more than that...That would be horrific.

My data indicate that teachers need time to create interesting lessons and experiment with different learning strategies and pedagogical techniques; however, some school reporting plans have directly affected classroom activities so much that teachers are challenged to find enough time to work with students. As an administrator, Deenie struggles with this dilemma. She stated,

> We can spend hours and hours building a report card that reports progress on every little level of the curriculum. But teachers don't have that time. We're running classes of thirty. It's just not possible...If somebody said to me do you think it would be good? I'd think, "Yes. It would be good." But we don't have the time to do it...I'm not sure how to

do that given the resources available.

Marcia claimed that lacking resources challenge teachers to be innovative in the classroom.

Innovation. Teacher innovation was another theme which emerged from the findings. Marcia claimed that lacking resources challenge teachers to be innovative in the classroom. She stated, "If we were allowed the time and opportunity to [write assessment tasks], we can make wonderful and creative things ourselves, assessing kids our way." Marcia described the assessment practices being used by the staff at MacDonald Elementary School. She explained, "The assessment methods here, I think, are excellent. What we do is we take a look at the curriculum and we align it to a growth pattern. And we do that through portfolio assessment." The assessment process is meaningful because it is developed by staff to meet a growing number of needs: the school's, the students', the parents', as well as the district's needs. She stated, "We've gone through lots of growth. We've realized there is no perfect thing. Just as we've realized there is no perfect report card, there is no perfect portfolio." Through this process of exploring and learning, she said the staff had learned to focus on what is most important: the students.

Marcia believed that although it requires a great deal of time and energy, she would continue to encourage teachers to use the same process for communicating student growth – as long as the teachers were comfortable with it and the parents were satisfied. So far, the program has been very successful at MacDonald Elementary School. Unfortunately, however, comprehensive assessment and reporting programs require a great deal of time. For this reason, Marcia was trying to create more flexibility for teachers in terms of restructuring the timetable to provide more time for teachers.

> That's one of my goals, to give teachers more time. Right now, because money is so tight, it's really, really hard without increasing the classroom enrolment to such an extent that it's ridiculous. One of the things we want to do is to keep our numbers low as well.

HK.AR had created a challenge for Marcia and her staff to continue to foster innovation and teacher creativity congruent with their common beliefs about teaching and learning. She explained that it was difficult to create practices that paralleled their beliefs while, at the same time, following the requirements of the district regulation. She stated,

> [HK.AR]...caused us a bit of a concern because we believe in portfolio assessment. We believe in assessing elementary students in this way. So when we get into...HK.AR, we need to have a hard data approach to measurement. I guess we need a "reference criterion," if you want to get into the assessment terminology. But we have to be very careful about what reference criterion we choose to use....

In fact, because of the level of expertise already displayed by teachers throughout the school, Marcia found that the regulation was an impediment to their progress. She believed that she was not alone in feeling this way:

> If I was on a staff which had very little experience with these kinds of things, a weak staff in terms of instruction, then I could use HK.AR as a tool to help them. But here, it can be a tool for hangups. It can slow us down because, now, I have to take time to follow the district mandate... So, I have difficulty when we try to make templates for all schools....In talking to...[people in other] schools, there are many who feel the same.

Marcia felt that HK.AR restricts site-based decision making although the Edmonton Public School district has been a role model for others who are decentralizing services. For this reason, advocates of site-based decision making are not likely to be strong advocates of HK.AR. She explained that Edmonton Public Schools were decentralized to give more control to the teachers and administrators in the schools. Marcia claimed that HK.AR was not allowing schools to retain the control that they had been granted through decentralization. She explained,

> HK.AR tends to go backwards to that belief system, because now it's sort of saying to you, "You're not responsible for your curriculum. You're not responsible for instruction, or your assessment. We are responsible for it."

For Marcia, like Deenie, the policy was redundant because schools did not need to be held accountable to both the district and the province. She stated,

> We can be assessed at any time. You know, I can have assessors come into my school at any time with only two weeks notice. But am I still accountable? Oh boy, am I ever! Are we still accountable to parents? Absolutely. Do we need HK.AR for that? I'm not sure....We are responsible to the provincial government for that.

These findings suggest that accountability was considered to be excessive by those teachers and principals who did not support the implementation process of the regulation.

Pertaining to the impact that HK.AR has had on teaching, the data clearly depict two different perspectives. One perspective reflects that there has been a positive impact on teaching, and consequently, on student achievement. Paradoxically, another perspective suggests that HK.AR has a negative impact on classroom teaching, and, consequently, a negative impact on student achievement. These findings will be illustrated in the next theme.

Influence of HK.AR on Learning

The following sub-sections illustrate the impact HK.AR has had on learning, as perceived by the principals and teachers who participated in this study. The first theme, "learning environment" encompasses two categories: communication and student ownership. Each of these areas includes findings which indicate that HK.AR had affected students' learning positively. Pertaining to the second theme, "emerging concerns," two categories reflect quite different perspectives. These categories are: self esteem and connotations. The information outlined in these categories suggests that HK.AR had had a negative impact on student learning.

Learning Environment

Many participants believed that students benefit when more comprehensive assessment and reporting strategies are used to communicate student growth. "Learning environment" illustrates the ways in which HK.AR is considered to have enhanced student growth in the sample of schools selected for this research.

Communications. The degree of communication about student learning between the home and the school is one factor which influences student achievement. Whether or not HK.AR has improved the quality of communication remains undecided. Marcia pointed out that "communication" is a term which has many interpretations. She believed that HK.AR has resulted in standard items being more clearly communicated from one school to another. She specifically referred to items such as mission and vision statements, student attendance, and grade levels. She said that the policy had not changed the quality of communication in any of the schools that she had visited. From her experience, she had certainly not perceived HK.AR to improve the way that schools communicated student growth. As the principal of MacDonald Elementary School, she encouraged teachers to meet with parents and students to ensure that communication about learning was clear. However, she did not believe that HK.AR would ensure this same degree of communication from teachers and administrations in other schools, and cautioned,

> Communication is a very intimate thing. Written communication can be misconstrued in many ways unless it's explained with a two way pattern of involvement. If I gave you this piece of paper and you read it, you could go away with a total misconception about this school. Unless we take the time to sit down and go through it...I give you some time to ask some questions...I ask you questions about your understanding of it, the clarifications of communications can be very foggy, to say the least. So whenever we have reporting, we are going to have misinterpretations about communications unless we have conferencing.

Deenie expressed a similar view. She acknowledged that the more schools are able to communicate openly with parents and students about achievement, the more clearly understood this information would be. At the same time, she anticipated that schools would have to eliminate some existing programs or activities in order to meet the demands of providing this service to students and their parents. For this reason, Deenie advocated a system of reporting which she described as "adequate."

According to several participants, however, HK.AR fosters more "honest" communication to students and their parents about learning. Grant witnessed a change in the way that schools were communicating student learning with students and their parents. Traditional ways of reporting often reflected comments about student effort, and rarely reported a student's grade level.

New reporting documents, however, contain curriculum-based feedback as well as grade level assessments for each core subject in which students are enrolled. For this reason, Grant considered communication to be more meaningful and attributed this change to HK.AR. He explained,

> It brought truth out of the closet...we would tell parents, over and over that their children were not gaining a year for a year....yet, when the students went to junior high, and saw that they really were behind, all of a sudden, parents felt lied to. They felt that the truth had not been told all along. So, as soon as we had to nail grade level down, that sort of brought everything out because everybody knew what was going on.

According to Grant, with curriculum based reporting, not only are students now receiving more detailed information about their personal growth; many students can accurately determine by how far they are achieving beyond or below grade level.

However, Alphie explained that there is a level of discomfort, initially, with both giving and receiving more honest feedback. Teachers feel uncomfortable making grade level statements. Likewise, parents and students are not always ready to receive this information. He stated,

> Before, when we had a student in our class who was working hard, whether or not they were working a different level of curriculum was not as clearly communicated as it is now...to have a child in grade seven be told that they're really working at a grade four level, and to actually have that written down on a piece of [paper]. To digest it, deal with it, and move on from there, is tough....

As a result of the regulation, students are provided with more detailed information about their academic growth. These findings indicate that students are experiencing more comprehensive understandings about their strengths and weaknesses regarding their growth in relation to the curriculum.

Student Ownership. Several participants indicated that more comprehensive assessment and reporting programs have resulted in students exhibiting a greater sense of ownership for their learning. Consequently, students have more knowledge about their role in the educational process.

The findings reveal that three factors emanating from HK.AR have significantly contributed to this awareness: more detailed information about individual growth; greater student involvement in assessment related activities; and more opportunities for individual enrichment due to a greater focus on differentiated programming. For these reasons, according to Alphie, HK.AR has significantly influenced learning. In regards to more detailed information, he stated,

> Whenever teachers are...making a more pointed effort to make their students successful in terms of knowing what's going to be measured, and knowing how it's going to be measured, knowing what has to be reported, knowing how all the information is going to be gathered...it can't help but help the children because it makes the picture clear for them.

Consequently, students are better informed because they experience the assessment process from a personal perspective. According to Grant, "[students] can see that their growth is being monitored.. they can see that it's worthwhile to monitor the growth because there is so much from one reporting period to the next." Consequently, they now participate more in assessing and evaluating their own progress. Alphie agreed, stating that he has witnessed an increase in student goal setting and self-assessment activities. This supplies evidence to support the second factor, greater student involvement in assessment related activities. Alphie explained,

> Teachers are...involving students a lot more in their learning, not just as learners, but as planners, and the self-evaluation that has formerly gone on in classrooms has increased dramatically over the last five years. In a traditional school that I was in a few years ago, there were very few teachers who involved students in designing rubrics...I think it's becoming more common practice now to involve students in all aspects of their learning: in the planning, in the actual doing, in the practice of self evaluation, and in the practice of how they are going to report their learning to their parents and to other people.

There is an element of learning that occurs throughout any process involving change. Student-centered goal setting is one such area which requires a great deal of experimentation by students and teachers. At Jackson School, goal setting is an integral part of the progress reporting system and occurs, formally, four times a year. Grant observed some of the challenges that students experience when goals are set over a period of several months. He explained,

> One of the bad things is that...your goals very quickly fall out of reach...the most meaningful goal setting...was when...Students actually set a weekly goal...the goals were reachable, they were attainable, there was immediate feedback on whether or not you were achieving them. I've really come full circle to believing that setting long term goals was a good exercise...but that...unless we break it down into smaller increments... long term goals seldom get achieved.

Likewise, goal setting is an integral component of HK.AR. According to Deenie, students need to understand what they are learning, as well as what they are not learning. As a result, they must be able to articulate their needs. This encourages them to take responsibility for their progress. Grant noted that some students are beginning to realize that the progress report is a small part of the learning process. He stated,

> ...students know the teachers, and know them well. They can see that teachers care about their learning...that their learning is special to them and is individualized. A progress reporting system is far more than a progress report, and the progress reporting system that we have emphasizes the...student, parent, teacher conference...the use of portfolios and demonstrations of student learning, and student led conferencing...students see the report card...as just another little piece of that whole puzzle that is meant to support them in their learning....

As a result, Alphie thought that learning has become more interesting. He said, "Now you don't have to fit all of those square pegs into those little round holes. There's lots of different sizes and shapes, and a lot of things that they can do." Alphie claimed that prior to the regulation, school was not always motivating for children because learning was often done and measured in prescribed ways. In parallel with the third factor, "enhanced opportunities for individual enrichment", Alphie stated,

> This regulation...allows [teachers] to set an achievement level higher, and to help children work towards something more...it facilitates an inspiration to work harder. When I say, "You're working at the grade 8 level and you're working in the grade 8 class and your achievement is at 98%, perhaps I as a teacher need to challenge you more."

As a result, teachers are modifying programs to match the individual needs of each student. A class may have students working on three or more grade levels of curriculum at the same time. The process, designed to meet the individual needs of students, enabling them to progress according to their personal abilities. Moreover, according to Alphie, the child's self esteem is heightened because they feel challenged. Students who are working on advanced material see that their learning is broader: their work requires a deeper level of skill and knowledge. For this reason, Alphie described HK.AR as a tool that enables teachers to challenge students. He explained,

> I think that the process of continuous...reporting based on the philosophy of continuous progress, based on meeting student needs in the classroom, provides us with more opportunities to stimulate children, rather than the old compartmentalized model where grade four classroom was only for grade four children, and all you did was grade four stuff. Now, in that grade four classroom, you could be seeing some stuff that is grade two or three, just as you might see some stuff that is grade five, six, or seven.

Although challenging, the process can be stimulating for teachers as well.

Whether or not HK.AR has an overall positive impact on student learning is a topic worthy of further research. The data do not include factual evidence of this–the positive effects reported are based on participants' perceptions. However, as revealed by the comments of the teachers and administrators in this study, the regulation has influenced students' understanding of their role in the learning process.

Emerging Concerns

Although Alphie considered HK.AR to have positively affected students' self esteem, he also noted that the regulation is also responsible for lowering the self concept of some students. Other participants observed that HK.AR may communicate a message to students which is not necessarily conducive to enhanced achievement. These findings will be discussed in the next two sections.

Self esteem. According to Deenie, some students do not want to know their grade level of achievement because they are not yet ready to learn. She stated, "They may be students at risk, in fact, many times, they are students at risk...You can take it to the extent where it will definitely lower their self esteem, in other cases, it will drive them right out of school." She contended that, at the high school level, many students already have a negative perception about school. Therefore, the reporting of grade level only confirms their fears of failure. Richard had the same concern and questioned whether or not some students' self esteem is negatively impacted by more honest reporting. However, like Deenie, he had no firm answer to this question.

In fact, all participants said that the self esteem of students is a factor which warrants consideration when assessing and reporting a student's level of achievement. According to Grant, this has been a topic of much discussion for educators throughout the development process of HK.AR. However, experimentation with grade level reporting in various schools throughout the district reveals that these concerns have not been validated. He explained,

> What we discovered was that kids...know where they are...It also has a positive spin off for some of our gifted kids...they knew that they were beyond grade level. So, to see that there were different abilities in...classes, took the stigma of student differences off of the heterogeneous classes, instead of putting more on.

Grant, however, felt that HK.AR has not resulted in a common understanding about performance standards – established criteria, rules, or principles by which student performances are judged. He stated, "That's the next hurdle to be leaped. I don't think a 65 in mathematics gives the students...a good view of what they know and can do in various areas of mathematics." For this reason, Grant believed that students, teachers, administrators, and parents need to develop a shared understanding of performance standards. To this effect, however, Marcia was particularly concerned, "You don't want to have all these references coming, "I'm measuring a kid this way, I'm measuring a kid that way." Sometimes they're hypocritical...." Marcia was also wary of the connotations that the HLAT process may have invoked.

Connotations. Marcia also noted that the province has not developed measurements for all aspects of the curriculum. Alberta Education has focussed on core subjects by implementing a provincial achievement testing program which tests only Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies. She contended that this practice communicates an underlying message that some subjects are more important than others. Furthermore, she explained that the Edmonton Public School District, in implementing Higher Level of Achievement Tests, has also focused on core subjects. She questioned,

> It's convenient that they don't have a test for Art, Health, and Physical Education. Why not? It's still curriculum that needs to be measured. Why only measure certain things?....And the answer, of course, is that it's very difficult.

Marcia affirmed that it is the role of educators and government to promote students' growth in all aspects of their development: the spiritual, the physical, as well as the intellectual aspects. She noted that most schools offer programs in music, art, drama, and in a variety of other areas which are not considered "core" subjects. Despite the fact that teachers are required to measure and report on growth in these areas, assessment materials for subjects other than

Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science are lacking. Although Marcia does not consider HLATs essential, she affirmed that support for non-core subject area assessment is something which the district needs to consider. She commented,

> Does that mean, right now, that schools that teach core, but not non-core subjects, that are still on curriculum and are getting better academic... results in the core subjects are better schools? No. If anything, what our district should have done is...instead of measuring something we already know...is spend energy on art, physical education and health....

It is not likely that the district administrators, teachers, and provincial government officials who develop and implement achievement testing programs intend to relay a message that non-core subjects are not important. However, if teachers are to effectively assess and evaluate student growth in these areas, then this is an issue which warrants further consideration.

Summary. Learning is an ongoing, intrinsic process. Many aspects pertaining to the advancement of teaching and learning remain to be explored. The intricacies of our cognitive processes, however, are not easily revealed. It is through investigation and experimentation that we will continue to understand the science of teaching and learning.

As to whether HK.AR has enhanced teaching and learning in the Edmonton Public school district, the findings reveal that the practitioners – administrators and classroom teachers – have some very divided perspectives. Further investigation into assessment and reporting practices will enable the policy making community to share existing knowledge and enhance conditions which foster quality education for children.

Policy Review

Unquestionably, HK.AR is perceived to have had an impact on teaching and learning. In light of the findings, however, the policy now requires some examination and review. This phase highlights the main ideas of the participants. In terms of the steps which need to be taken next, there are, once again, two groups of thought. "Don't stop here" and "Needs assessment" are the categories which capture the essential elements of each perspective.

"Don't Stop Here"

According to Alphie, the Edmonton Public school district promotes student achievement as a fundamental priority. The district's initiative to enhance student achievement is based on research, and some very specific information. This information has implications for schools and how they communicate student growth, the focal points of which include involving parents as partners in the learning process, on-task behaviour, and helping students to understand the short and long term goals of their learning. For this reason, Alphie stated,

> The one recommendation I would make is "don't stop here"! It's only the beginning of what progress reporting should be...I would challenge our district to say something like what should progress reporting look like in the year 2000, and in the year 2010? How will parents and students access information about their own performance? When? From whom? What kind of information? What kind of information will they have the choice to access or or to access?

Alphie also believed that more discussion is needed to develop a common understanding about performance standards. He declared that this will not be an easy task, and will not happen quickly. Decision making must include all educational stake holders who play a role in public schooling: administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members – a necessary condition of policy making at a time when partnerships are an essential component of the democratic process.

Share success. Marcia emphasized the importance of professional development opportunities for teachers. To this effect, she envisioned more sharing of ideas and successes between teachers and schools. She wondered, "How are people doing what they're doing, and how are they implementing it and using it on a successful basis with kids?" In past years, the district has offered professional development workshops in a variety of areas. Marcia referred to a workshop series about effective teaching which consisted of ongoing, self-directed workshops to encourage professional reflection and growth. She thought that the effective teaching series could be revised to include a component on assessment and evaluation. As this kind of a workshop emphasizes "highly motivating people looking at highly motivating people," Marcia ascertained that teaching and learning would benefit significantly.

To prevent misinterpretations of the requirements of the regulation, Joan would like to see samples of what other schools are doing. She would like district personnel to provide schools with samples of successful methods for reporting, as well as samples which are not considered as successful. Increased opportunities for dialogue between schools and with district personnel might provide meaningful information for people with unanswered questions. Such dialogue might be advantageous in light of other recommendations uncovered in the findings. These recommendations shall be discussed in the next section.

"More..." Four key areas have emerged from the findings, each of which, participants indicated, requires more attention. One area has already been revealed: sharing information between educational stake holders is necessary if schools and the community are to develop a common understanding about standards used to assess and report student growth. The remaining areas encompass leadership, flexibility, consistency, and frequency in reporting.

Pertaining to leadership, Alphie indicated that the district has not provided enough guidance in terms of what school reporting documents should look like. Similar to Joan, Alphie believed that schools are lacking some necessary direction. He stated,

> I think that rather than working towards a big document, that maybe the district needs to provide more leadership than they have...I know that's a terrible thing to say. But we need more leadership in what the document should look like. I know they're always working on templates and ideas for documents and giving samples and saying that these are the minimum requirements and that they don't like to take away all the personal styles and flavours of the schools as they are creating their documents. But I still think there has to be some kind of a simpler format that would be acceptable at all schools.

Alphie contended that reporting documents need to be logical, easy to read, and require less time for teachers and school personnel to create. He stated, "[W]hen we spend massive amounts of time writing all this information to report student achievement, we take away from important amounts of time that can be spent on improving student achievement."

All participants expressed discomfort with a centralized approach to policy making. Joan remarked, "...deciding...the best way of doing things..., and...mandating it to everyone...is not...the best way of doing [things]." Marcia explained that teachers need flexibility and freedom to teach kids in ways which are most conducive to learning. She commented, "If we weigh the sheep in so many ways that we forget to feed them, then things start to happen in a different way....It's the tail wagging the dog." Moreover, she contended that rules and regulations restrict school practices rather than improve them. She stated,

> Schools don't run really well with a lot of rules, just like kids don't run well with a lot of rules...I think in our quest for better schools, we've made our curriculum much too unwilling, our assessment process very difficult to understand...and our instructional approach...difficult to teach in the ways that kids learn best.

Changes in curriculum can also impede teaching and learning. She noted, "Just as we... make it work, the curriculum changes and boom! We're right back there at square one."

As previously noted, all participants expressed a need for more similarity in terms of reporting student progress from one school to another. Moreover, all who participated stated that the process needs to be simpler and require less time on behalf of teachers. Alphie stated,

> There has to be more consistency. If we're told that we're to report progress, and that we have to report achievement levels at least one time a year, some schools are reporting it several times, some...once a year. Some are doing the minimum of what the HK.AR regulations say. Some are going beyond that.

He believed that the use of common descriptors and language between schools will improve the transferability of student achievement information from one site to another. Likewise, teachers, administrators, parents, and students will have a similar understanding about the information that is exchanged. This is increasingly important as statistics indicate that the number of Canadians who are changing professions and relocating to other areas of the country is growing (Osberg, Wien, & Grude, 1995). Alphie affirmed that a standard reporting format is critical for parents with children in these situations. Otherwise it will be very difficult to understand essential information about a student's level of achievement. Similarly, the language used by teachers to describe a child's performance must be understood from one school to the next. Joan explained that the language used in some curriculum documents can be a challenge for teachers. She added, "What I would do is [bring into the school] some plain language experts and have them translate that sort of thing so that teachers know exactly what they're looking for." Because many teachers have difficulty understanding and interpreting curriculum language, both Joan and Alphie wondered how parents could understand curriculum-based statements about student growth. Alphie claimed that the range of interpretations regarding student achievement throughout the district is a concern. He noted, "If the whole purpose [of HK.AR] is to more clearly communicate information, then we'd better be communicating in a language that's common." It is essential that assessment and reporting language be understood by children, and be interpreted in the same way by teachers, administrators, and parents, and others. In summary, Alphie remarked, "We have to...ask better questions...." One of the questions which Alphie asked pertained to the frequency with which other schools were communicating student growth and information about grade level of curriculum. The findings indicate that this is another area warranting further review.

Participants indicated that the frequency of student reporting varies considerably in schools throughout the district. According to Alphie, some schools have three reporting periods while others have four or more. The process needs to be more consistent. All participants affirmed that the frequency of information communicated about achievement was key to enhancing student achievement. According to Alphie, schools must report grade level information at a time of the year which encourages students to use the information as a lever to working towards a higher level of achievement. He believed that reporting grade level at the end of the year is not particularly mindful of students' needs, especially at the high school level when students have to successfully complete a number of required courses in order to receive a diploma. He stated, "We need to report on an ongoing basis. It's not ethically fair to report [grade level] at the end of the year. What can they, the students, do then?"

Similarly, he said that the process for student goal setting also required more frequent practice and review. Time periods between school semesters can be long. If students are encouraged to set goals at the beginning of each semester, the time lapse from the beginning to the end of the term may be significant and, therefore, students may find it difficult to assess their progress and set new goals. For this reason, according to Grant, goal setting programs require frequent monitoring and review.

Needs Assessment

Based on their experiences in schools, several participants expressed that they had not witnessed a need for a more detailed reporting programs. Deenie contended,

> We have to make sure that there's a demand out there for it as opposed to us creating the demand. Within that also, recognizing that, yes, we do

> have a responsibility as educators to educate the parents and the students....

Along with teachers and the administrative team at Springfield High, Deenie was considering a new reporting system for the 1997-1998 academic year. However, she had not experienced a single request from a parent to change the simple report card format that has traditionally been used to communicate student growth. She added, "There just hasn't been a demand for a change. Parents seem to be getting all that they need from the report card, and teachers and students are feeling that it is adequately meeting their needs." She noted that interim reports were given to students in between official reporting periods, whereby teachers used computer marks programs to prepare short reporting documents for individual students. Deenie also remarked that teachers make a number of telephone calls to parents each semester. As a result, there is strong communication between the home and the school about student growth and student concerns. Calls are completed to parents or guardians by subject area teachers, based on identified needs.

Teacher supervision. Marcia noted that HK.AR would serve schools better if it was used as a support system for administrators whenever reporting wasn't happening as effectively, or as frequently, as required. She stated, "If...there were big, big loop holes in the [reporting] process that were hard to fill in, then that's when HK.AR wouldn't be a problem, and would be supported." Deenie and Marcia were both concerned that the regulation causes teachers to do unnecessary work, and therefore, slows them down in their quest to improve student achievement. Deenie believed that teaching and learning would be enhanced if school administrators were to simply encourage effective teacher supervision. She stated,

> We are leaders within the school. If teachers are analyzing marks and student achievement, we're analyzing our teachers for how well they are analyzing lessons, teaching lessons, and reporting student achievement. And if they are not doing those things then we are dealing with a weaker teacher...anything from release from contract, providing professional services, or providing other kinds of opportunities for them to grow.

Unfortunately, HK.AR has placed a lot of demands on schools in terms of resources. According to the findings, some principals feel that they cannot afford to implement programs of choice because of the time or resources required to do so. Although Deenie calls herself an advocate of a high level of accountability in education, she finds HK.AR constricting. She added, "The more rules we have, in many ways...takes away from teacher initiative...teacher creativity."

Marcia affirmed that the Edmonton Public school district must continue to revise HK.AR to meet the needs of schools and their clients. She supported the individual differences of schools and affirmed that this must be taken into consideration as the policy is reviewed. Like Deenie, Marcia stated that an effective school program would include an element of teacher supervision. Marcia advocated for a form of supervision which fosters diversity and teacher growth. In relation to HK.AR, she explained,

> I think all regulations need to be revised constantly to find out where your group is and what's happening. Just as I don't think there's any perfect reporting procedure, it's a continuing process....Don't paint everybody with the same brush. We need to use multiple assessment strategies when evaluating staff performance. Here, we've reused... revised... our... assessment strategies....That is a fair process because everybody has

> had a piece of the pie... my staff... feel very comfortable...because they've been...involved...I feel very comfortable... because there's many different ways that I can...assess one person.

Marcia pointed out that most policies are intended to standardize practices to some degree. She was not comfortable with that.

"The fad trap." Joan noted that the current focus on assessment and reporting practices in Edmonton Public Schools is reflective of a similar trend throughout North America. As a result, she expected that HK.AR would be further revised to better meet the needs of schools in the future. However, she feared that the focus on enhancing assessment might become a passing fad unless teachers and administrators remain focussed on educating children as their fundamental priority. Deenie considered that it is in the best interest of educators to ask if comprehensive assessment programs are really as effective in enhancing learning as the experts declare. She did not profess to know an answer to this question herself, but she affirmed that administrators must be careful not to implement HK.AR, or any policy, in haste. She confessed, "I don't think there is a real need [for HK.AR], in terms of out there in the every day good teaching of students. Part of that which is getting in the way...is my own personal philosophy of keeping things simple and doing quality jobs in our classrooms." Perhaps if the regulation had been introduced to a small number of schools, tested over a period of time, and shown to improve teaching and learning, she would feel more inclined to implement it.

Small scale implementation. Marcia pointed out that a weakness of HK.AR is its limited focus. She remarked,

> The the flip side of that [HK.AR] is, on its quest to [improving teaching and learning], would it be...more focused in... teaching, more safety oriented,

> kind and coordinated to...staff, a better communicator with your parents?....Possibly not. It might have disadvantages...It might create problems.

Moreover, she wondered if HK.AR has hindered some schools in their quest to increase student achievement. For this reason, Marcia ascertained that regulations such as HK.AR must be implemented on a small scale, initially. During the phase of policy review, changes should also be made in incremental steps. A process involving small-scale experimentation is more cost effective than large scale program implementation. Moreover, the process would be less disruptive to teaching and learning in the majority of schools throughout the district.

Summary of the Findings

The observations described have implications for all educational stake holders. It is through continued discussion, investigation, and experimentation that researchers and practitioners will be able to connect the intricate links between assessment and reporting, and teaching and learning.

HK.AR has provided teachers, students, administrators and parents an opportunity to experience and investigate some of the most recent research in the area of enhancing student achievement. For some, the experience has fortified their beliefs about teaching and learning. For others, it may only have confused them more. A summary of the findings is provided (Table 1) to highlight the main issues which have been identified in the data.

Table 1:
Phases, categories and themes

Phase	Theme	Category
I. Policy development	1. Shared decision making	a. input from principals b. a plan which evolved
	2. Centrally mandated policy	a. nebulous origins b. fast-tracking
II. Policy implementation	1. Policy reaffirms school practices	a. reinforcing standards b. a need to move forward
	2. Causal relations: issues and challenges	a. "fit" with established practices in the school b. adaptive processes
III. Policy impact		
A. Effects on teaching	1. Professional capacity	a. knowledge / skills acquisition b. accountability
	2. Impact on classroom activities	a. resources b. teacher innovation
B. Effects on learning	1. Learning environment	a. communications b. student ownership
	2. Emerging concerns	a. self esteem b. connotations
IV. Policy review	1. Don't stop here	a. share successes b. More: leadership, flexibility, consistency, frequent and ongoing
	2. Needs assessment	a. teacher supervision b. the "fad trap" c. small scale implementation

Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter consists of two sections. The first provides a review of additional literature relevant to the emergent findings. Second, the findings are discussed in relation to the initial literature review. These findings are discussed in terms of policy development, policy implementation, policy impact, and policy review.

Findings in Relation to Emergent Literature

Although "policy development", "policy impact", and "policy analysis and review" were not researched prior to completing an analysis of the data, each of these topics emerged in the findings and will be discussed in relation to literature not introduced in the review of the literature. This section contains four headings: Policy Development and the Decision Making Process in Relation to HK.AR; Policy Implementation in Relation to HK.AR; Policy Impact in Relation to HK.AR; and Policy Review in Relation to HK.AR.

The next section does not provide a thorough analysis of the policy development process. Instead, it presents an overview of some of the influences and effects of HK.AR in relation to the policy development process. The findings on policy development–as with the succeeding three sections–are reflective of the policy-practice continuum. The intention is to communicate a more holistic view of the HK.AR policy and its impact on teaching and learning in schools thought the district.

Policy Development in Relation to HK.AR

The literature suggests that there has been a paradigm shift in the educational policy process; research indicates that economic forces are directly and indirectly influencing educational policy making in nations around the world (Calvert, 1993; Carter & O'Neill, 1995; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe; 1995; Taylor, 1996; Ryan, 1996). In countries such as Great Britain, New Zealand, the United States and Canada, educational reforms reflect market-like solutions as a means to offset government debts and deficits (Ball, 1994). Observers have identified distinctive policy shifts in educational reforms away from equalitarian educational goals to an emphasis on efficiency and accountability goals (Mawhinney, 1994). In Alberta, as in other Canadian provinces, there is growing evidence that political and educational decision making is increasingly influenced by underlying market values (Barlow & Robertson, 1994).

The Alberta Education documents Meeting the Challenge:Three Year Business Plan: 1994/95 - 1996/97 and Creating A Better Learning Future: Business and Education Working Together (1996) outline significant reforms for the system of education in Alberta including enhanced business relationships in education. In response to concerns from members of the business community regarding the effects of an ineffective education system on the labour market, recommendations, indicators and outcomes for business involvement in education were included in Framework For Enhancing Business Involvement in Education (May,1996). The document indicated the following projects as government priorities for education: (a) to create community structures, (b) to promote workplace learning, (c) to encourage apprenticeships, (d) to enhance lifelong education, (e) to review school programs and standards, (f) to develop credentials for a global economy, and, (g) to provide legislative and policy support. Central to the debate however, is whether or not new government initiatives in the area of education and business are based on sound pedagogical principles and ethical research, or if decisions are made in terms of their economic feasibility and left for the "educational market" to determine.

In education, the market is intended to be driven by the self-interest of parents, as consumers, choosing schools that will provide the maximum advantage to their children (Gerwirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). For this reason, educational policy must respond to their needs. The decisions of school policy makers, as producers, must ensure the survival of their institutions. Referred to as 'economic Darwinism' (Ball, 1993), this principle is based on the rules of supply and demand. An increasingly market-based approach in education has numerous implications for schools and educational policy making. For this reason, it is important to identify the salient characteristics and theories which are indicative of a market-based approach in education.

The literature reveals that two characteristics appear to be implicit in a market-based approach to education. First, an element of competition is essential to increase the degree to which schools and school districts must compete for students. Secondly, there must be an active level of stake holder involvement in the educational process: administrators, parents, teachers, and other representatives of the policy making community of the school who are the "producers" and "consumers" of the system. These factors are critical to the "survival" of public schools. Market-based trends in educational policy making are further influenced by theories such as "total quality management" (TQM)– a management style which is characterized by customer perceptions of quality (Murgatroyd & Morgan, 1993), and "decentralized decision making", another familiar theme from the private sector (Osberg, Wien, & Gardner, 1995). These factors combined make the topics of business in education and market-based approaches in educational policy very complex.

The next section reflects the literature most pertinent to showing how business and market approaches in education are influencing the educational policy process in Alberta. Although the HK.AR policy is an administrative regulation of the Edmonton Public School district, the influence of market relations in education and government legislation in Alberta suggest that the policy is somewhat related. If unrelated however, HK.AR is a regulation which is, at a minimum, politically and economically astute.

Business, Politics, and Educational Policy in Alberta

In Canada, the call for a more highly skilled work force has created a necessary alliance between educators, government representatives and business people (Bloom, 1991; Alberta Chamber of Resources, 1995). The alliance between business and education, however, is more evident in some provinces than in others. In Alberta, government initiatives on behalf of the business community to influence educational policy are documented in a number of reports (Alberta Education, 1994; Alberta Education, 1995; Alberta Education, 1996). Implicit to this view, there is evidence of an increasingly market-based approach to educational policy development in Alberta through government reforms in education. Regardless of their separate roles and functions in government, school districts, communities, schools and classrooms, a networking of interacting relationships exists between members of the policy making community and representatives of the business world. HK.AR, an accountability regulation, is reflective of the current government focus on outcomes and indicators of performance in Alberta. However, it is indicative of a much larger transformation which is occurring within Alberta and the macrocosm of Canadian society. In this age of globalization, social uncertainty is reflected by an apparent mistrust of public institutions. There is contradictory, empirical evidence that schools in North America are not competitive enough. Rooted in exaggerated misinformation, public contentions pertaining to poor results on international exams, increasing drop out rates, and a lofty illiteracy rate are quite the opposite of what reliable data show. Barlow and Robertson (1994) note that success is dependent upon which indicators we choose to value most, and question why we choose not to report the positive things within the public system of education (Lyseng, 1997). Also reflective of a shift in the politics of policy change, educational policy development, once guided by models which reconstructed a rationalized logic of policy which relied on "empirical verification, the scientific method, and causality" (Pal, 1992, p. 60), is being replaced with models which stress "contingency, chance, and interpretation" (Gregware & Kelly, 1990, p.36).

Taylor (1996) traced the transmission of corporate ideology from national business groups to educational policy in Alberta. Notably, she found that the interest of business groups in education has arisen from a corporate vision which originated elsewhere. She stated,

> [A] hegemonic alliance has developed between corporations and the state in Alberta... [This is] symbolized in the the concept of employability skills as part of a broader reform agenda for public schooling.... (p. 2)

Taylor further suggested that the purpose of business involvement in education is to influence educational policy to meet corporate needs. Two organizations have been particularly influential in the process: the Business Council on National Issues (BCNI), consisting of chief executive officers of major Canadian corporations, and the Conference Board of Canada, a research institution dedicated to enhancing the performance of Canadian organizations within the global economy (Pamphlet on National Business and Education Centre); both are affiliates of larger American organizations (Calvert, 1993, p.19). Calvert (1993) also denoted a number of business efforts designed to influence educational policy. For example, Focus 2000: Report on the Task Force on

Education and Training (1989), from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and Learning to Win Education (1991), from the the National Advisory Board on Science and Technology are reports which outline national goals with recommendations for a strong emphasis on science, math, technology, and business-education partnerships as well as "performance assessments against the goals" (p.93). Accordingly, the Alberta government's vision for education reflects an emphasis in these areas precisely (Olsen, 1997).

The HK.AR policy complements the provincial government's results-based orientation to educational achievement and accountability. In 1994, the Alberta Education Guide to Education endorsed outcomes-based reporting – a means for communicating student performance in relation to the goals of the provincial curriculum, further legislating compulsory reporting of student's grade levels of curriculum completed in each of the core subject areas from Kindergarten to grade nine. Public access to individual school achievement test results – standardized measures of student performance – were also a government specification at this time. These factors are indicative of the shift to an increasingly outcomes-based approach to education in Alberta. However, they may also be attributed to a more performance oriented approach representative of market influences.

The framework of a market-oriented approach to education and educational policy in Alberta is reminiscent of numerous government reform initiatives. The 1993-1994 amalgamation and reorganization of school districts indicated initial government attempts to reduce the provincial deficit. Facilitated by massive cuts to the education system in Alberta, there has been a shift in the language of education. As the pressure to effectively compete in the global market increases, terms once synonymous with business and economics –

"downsizing," "customers and clients," "products and performance" – are increasingly used in relation to schools and school districts. Combined with decentralized funding to the level of individual schools, administrators must exhibit exceptional leadership skills. Moreover, they must possess entrepreneurial management skills, notably in the area of public relations and fiscal management. Evidence of market-oriented changes in education have numerous implications for teachers as well. Excellent pedagogical skills, as well as positive public relations and communication skills are essential to fairly assess, report and provide appropriate programming for a range of student abilities and needs. The HK.AR policy requires teachers to report student growth according to the grade level of curriculum completed, not just for core subjects – a requirement of the province – but for each course in which students are enrolled. For this reason, not only was the introduction of HK.AR to schools within the district timely; it may also have been politically astute as it created an imperative for more comprehensive communication of student growth beyond the requirements of provincial legislation.

Most notably, Alberta has witnessed another change indicative of the paradigm shift to an increasingly market oriented approach in education: educational policy, once exclusively shaped and enacted by a small group of key figures (Mitchell, 1981), now appears to be inclusive of a much broader sector of society: administrators, teachers, parents, students, policy making officials, and the tax paying general public. Recent government legislation requires schools to create "school councils"– governing bodies consisting of community members, parents, school representatives, and the school principal. As well, government-initiated "round table" discussions or public forums on education, have resulted in more visible opportunities for public contribution to the policy making process (Alberta Education, 1994, 1995, 1996). With a growing number of schools now operating under the auspices of site-based management, school councils are left to devise and interpret policies according to the needs of the students and the individual school community. As a result, the educational policy development process is decidedly hermetic. Decisions are no longer traceable to a central policy making body. Instead, they are the result of a multi-layered approach to decision making, the infrastructure of which is intricately linked together. With more district schools operating under the principles of site-based management, it is not unreasonable to assume that these factors have contributed significantly to the perceptions of participants about the development process of HK.AR. As revealed by the findings, the ambiguity expressed by some participants about the nebulous origins of the policy was contradicted by data indicating the existence of a shared decision making process which involved considerable input from school principals. Despite measures taken to control such discrepancies, HK.AR may have been thoroughly researched and understood by some participants, but considerably less by others. The findings indicate that the district policy to reform assessment, like government strategies to reform education, do not appear to be the result of a haphazard, tentative, and largely isolated conglomeration of activities. Instead, the policy process appears to be reflective of values underlying a market philosophy: decision making which is representative of the values of the consumer, and a quasi-public system of accountability. This introduces a second critical element of a market-based approach in education: competition.

Government reforms to the provincial system of education in Alberta have permitted the introduction of "charter" schools into the system. Current legislation for charter schools in Alberta permits a small group of individuals to create or co-opt a school and run it according to a shared charter or vision. Taken to the extreme, these same small groups which can determine the school's educational charter, may surreptitiously limit pedagogy and content in favour of private or elitist interests (Lyseng, 1997). However, when combined with open boundary legislation, parents have considerably more choice in deciding where they will send their children, and how their children will be educated. The need for schools to compete for students is further emphasised by formulas which determine school funding levels: elementary and junior high schools are funded according to the number of students they attract. High schools, however, receive funding according to the number of students who receive an acceptable course mark. According to Deenie, course completion at the high school level means achieving at least 25%. For this reason, Deenie thought that the accountability level for high school teachers was already present before HK.AR was introduced as a board policy. Teachers are compelled to help students achieve the minimum requirements for completing courses so that the school can receive funding. Prior to the change in funding, a teacher may have been losing up to forty per cent of their students.

Although HK.AR was designed to enhance the communication of student growth in Edmonton Public Schools, the policy is equally reflective of a district initiative to improve student performance. As government reforms accentuate student performance, so does the district HK.AR policy. Regarding market influences in education, it must be added that a corporate ideology would indicate the goal is to better prepare youth for the competitive global market.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that these pseudo-business practices in education entirely affirm the existence of a market approach to educational policy making in Alberta. Educational policy, like all policy, is embedded in politics. What is interesting, however, is that economics appear to play an increasing role in educational decision making. The revision of the HK.AR regulation was the result of numerous factors, each of which influenced the policy development process in a unique way. Educational policies reflect societal tensions. For this reason, policy development, like policy implementation, must reflect a holistic approach, flexible and inclusive of the broader influences of the organization.

Policy Implementation in Relation to HK.AR

In this study, participants described the implementation process of HK.AR as "reaffirming school practices" or "causal" because the policy either reinforced what was already occurring within the school, or because the policy caused issues and challenges to occur. The direct opposition of these categories is consistent with findings in the literature related to policy implementation. Knight (1991) described the implementation of a teacher evaluation policy from the perspective of two principals. Results indicated a difference in their interpretation of the policy, as well as in their personal beliefs and values. Based on the findings of this research, Knight proposed that problems in implementing policy will occur if those who are implementing the policy have values which are different from the values which are implicit in the policy. Knight's study has implications for HK.AR as the findings provide an explanation for differences in the degree of implementation of the regulation in schools throughout the district. Deenie, the principal of Springfield High School, was not in support of teachers' time being largely dedicated to the development of detailed curriculum-based reporting documents. Instead, she preferred teachers to spend more time preparing lessons, helping students with their work, and providing ongoing communication through whole class feedback, individual student feedback, and telephone contact with parents. Her belief system about communicating growth had an obvious influence on the degree of implementation of the HK.AR policy and the written reporting system to communicate student growth. When this research was conducted, Springfield's teachers were using "bubble sheets" to report student averages for each term. Report cards included written information about student effort, however, contrary to the requirements of HK.AR, the reporting document did not include curriculum-based comments about students' levels of achievement nor information about their grades curriculum levels for core subjects. In comparison to other schools which had participated in the study, the written reporting program at Springfield was considerably less reflective of an outcomes-based system. However, descriptions from Marcia, Joan, Grant, and Alphie indicated the existence of a comprehensive outcomes-based program for communicating student growth at both MacDonald Elementary and Jackson Middle School. All participants conveyed a strong belief that effective communication was implicit to enhancing student growth. On the other hand, while Marcia and Joan found the HK.AR policy to be restrictive and expressed concern for the mandatory practices that it imposed on schools, Grant and Alphie fully supported the policy. For Grant and Alphie, HK.AR confirmed that assessment and reporting practices at Jackson School reflected the district philosophy. In fact, both participants indicated a desire to "move forward," and provided various recommendations in terms of the next steps to be taken in enhancing student growth through effective assessment and reporting. Not surprizingly, Jackson School had an impressive computerized system for communicating student growth and a full time teacher who's professional role was largely involved in facilitating the process for assessing, evaluating and reporting student growth.

Implementation delays may also have been created by the interaction of HK.AR with other policies (Mawhinney, 1994), or the context in which the policy was understood (Knight, 1991). Contextual factors specific to the age level groupings of schools were also noted as a factor contributing to differences in policy implementation. At Springfield High school, Deenie speculated that students were of an age and maturity to understand their learning without receiving detailed information about grade level of curriculum completed. She did not receive any requests from parents for more detailed information in the form of a written reporting document and questioned the feasibility of the HK.AR policy.

A study of curriculum implementation by Bosetti (1990) revealed that those who were directly involved in decisions related to implementation, reflected a positive attitude toward the change. The attitude that was reflected by principal participants is consistent with this information. Unlike Marcia or Deenie, Grant described being involved in the policy development process and was a strong advocate of HK.AR. According to Bosetti, economic, social and political factors also influenced decisions about the implementation process of educational policies: a lack of accurate information about the goals of the policy and how it fit into the larger picture of educational reform were identified as impediments to policy implementation. This is consistent with findings on HK.AR which reflected participants' uncertainty about the policy process and may have delayed progress in some schools.

Board policies permeate all aspects of the oganization. For this reason, they present a powerful lever for the exercise of leadership (Carver, 1990, p.28).

In-as-much as administrators use policies as a point of departure however, it is an individual's values and beliefs that will determine the effectiveness of the implementation of a new policy. As argued by Drucker (1967), decisions are based largely on universal understandings. However, only the contributions of each individual in the organization will facilitate change and determine the impact of the policy on the system.

Findings in Relation to the Literature

During the research process, I was particularly interested in the effects of HK.AR on teaching and learning. Consequently, this topic became the focal point of the data collection and analysis process. Although participants expressed interesting viewpoints about HK.AR and the policy development process, an analysis of its influences proved to be very complex–reflective of broad social, economic and political forces in the environment.

Policy Impact in Relation to HK.AR

Despite a considerable amount of research on policy change and reform-related issues, attempts to restructure education have not resulted in change of the order and scale required to have a systemic and lasting impact on educational organization and pedagogical practice (Hall & Carter, 1995). In terms of time, money, and human resources, attempts to inform policy have resulted in little significant change at the classroom level (Cuban, 1988). Sarason (1990) argued that recent reform initiatives are reflective of past attempts to restructure education and are not likely to result in any significant change in teaching or learning. However, despite some concerns expressed by participants, the findings of this study suggest that HK.AR has measurably affected teaching and learning in schools having successfully implemented the regulation. These will be discussed in two sections: the first section deals specifically with the impact of the HK.AR policy on teaching. The second section is reflective of the policy's impact on learning.

The Impact of HK.AR on Teaching. The findings suggest that HK.AR has implications for teaching and administrative practice. However, participants indicated that declining resources challenged teachers and administrators to effectively implement comprehensive assessment and reporting plans in their schools. These observations will be discussed in light of the themes which emerged from the data analysis: "educational supervision and teacher efficacy," and "accountability."

Educational supervision and teacher efficacy. Many supervisory practices in education have evolved from traditional management theories. Although these management theories have provided valuable information for worker supervision, they have been problematic when applied to an educational context for which they were not originally intended. When applied in a professional context, more direct forms of supervision often result in task simplification (Sergiovanni, 1990): under direct and close supervision teachers will teach according to the system, fearing to experiment with more innovative, risk-associated strategies; if alone, however, they will teach in ways that make sense to them (p.120). Although the number of administrators who assess teacher efficacy according to traditional checklists and formal classroom observation sessions is decreasing, there is anecdotal evidence that some administrators continue to supervise and evaluate teaching in this way.

Concern in recent years about poor student performance and the quality of classroom instruction has led to greater public scrutiny upon education and upon teaching in specific (Barlow & Robertson, 1994). In an effort to uncover more comprehensive information in the area of teacher efficacy and supervision, a number of educational researchers have interweaved research findings with teachers' actual experiences (e.g., Cogan, 1973; Glatthorn, 1984; Glickman, 1985; da Costa, 1993; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993; da Costa & Riordan, 1997). As a result, educational supervision has evolved to encompass much more than evaluating the surface aspects of teaching and the classroom management skills of teachers for employment purposes. However, for seasoned teachers to experience professional growth, they must expand their professional capacity. This includes the pedagogical knowledge, skills and attitudes which facilitate teaching and enhance learning. As indicated by Alphie, Grant, and Richard, HK.AR has had a favourable impact on teaching in schools where the policy was supported. In schools where HK.AR had been successfully implemented, teachers were perceived to be knowledgeable about assessment theory and practice. All participants indicated that HK.AR required teachers to use the curriculum more extensively than ever before.

Traditional measures of teacher effectiveness such as warmth, furniture arrangements, and voice intonation are indicative of good teaching. However, they require a very low level of pedagogical knowledge. In order to know whether or not meaningful teaching and learning is occurring, administrators must also consider teachers' management of the curriculum, their diagnostic skills, and their ability to accurately assess, communicate, and program for student growth. Moreover, effective public relations and communication skills are essential. The difference between traditional measures of effective teaching and those which require a more sophisticated assessment of teachers' knowledge, skills and abilities is evident. Studies dating back fifteen years and earlier indicate that supervision of instruction was seldom a priority of school principals (Stockman, 1983). However, the findings from the research on

HK.AR indicate that the policy has eliminated the possibility of this happening to the extent that it may have in the past.

Administrative supervision of instruction, although indirect, is implicit to HK.AR and the process of outcomes-based reporting. Participants revealed that the policy has enabled administrators to identify strengths and weaknesses of teachers in terms of curriculum content and how it is addressed without having to directly and closely supervise classroom practices. Moreover, comprehensive report cards provide more information to students and their parents about the teaching and learning process including the knowledge that teachers have about individual students. As Alphie noted, HK.AR requires teachers, as well as students, to demonstrate their skills.

In order to be effective, teachers need to experience stimulation at work and motivation in teaching (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988). Moreover, they need feedback about their performance, and support for innovative ideas and professional development. The problem that arises is that not all administrators can provide the kind of leadership which stimulates teachers to refine their pedagogical skills or their knowledge of students and curriculum-related issues. This is complicated by the fact that not all teachers are willing, interested, or perceive a need to seek ongoing professional development. However, according to reports from participants, HK.AR appears to have created a professional development imperative. No longer is there a choice for a teacher to opt not to seek professional development: in order to assess and communicate growth based on curricular outcomes, teachers are required to have more intimate knowledge about the curriculum as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each one of their students. Moreover, because many schools have purchased computer systems to communicate student growth, teachers must have the technological skills to use them. The magnitude of professional development opportunities in technology and communicating student growth is evident in district inservice calendars (1994, 1995, 1996).

Teacher supervision is an area which can require a great amount of time. According to Sergiovanni (1993), informal classroom visits are an effective means of supervising teaching and learning without requiring a great deal of administrative time. Casual encounters through informal visits to classrooms or conversations with teachers about their work should be a focus for any administrator. However, informal supervision of instruction should be accompanied by at least one other supervisory option (Sergiovanni, 1990). To some degree, the HK.AR policy permits administrators to indirectly assess a teacher's level of pedagogical knowledge without a formal observation session. Several participants suggested that comprehensive report cards permit administrators to assess teacher efficacy at a more sophisticated level than informal classroom visits. Consequently, HK.AR can act as a tool to help administrators indirectly supervise teachers' assessment and reporting practices in a way which goes beyond other supervisory preferences. On the other hand, a necessary condition for effective teaching and growth-oriented supervision is the support of a leader who is trusted and able to build or enhance a sense of trust and respect amongst teachers. Professional growth will be inhibited if HK.AR is used as an administrative tool to detect and eliminate weaker teachers.

There are many options for supervision which can be effective in enhancing teachers' growth: professional dialogue amongst colleagues; curriculum development featuring teachers; peer supervision which focuses on observation, discussion, and self-analysis; and peer coaching. No matter which option is preferred however, a supportive environment is germane to effective supervision. The literature and the findings of this study suggest that HK.AR can be an effective tool for supervising instruction and enhancing professional growth in an environment where teachers feel supported, stimulated, and accountable to themselves, their students, and the teaching profession.

Accountability. In spite of Canadian students' poor achievement levels as reflected by the media in recent years, government funding cutbacks have resulted in a lack of instructional support (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1992). While some parents claim that schools are not giving their children the guidance that they need, others claim that schools are not effectively communicating information about student growth (Armstrong, 1996). However, supporters of HK.AR indicated that the policy may actually enhance the public image of schools in the district because it requires teachers to demonstrate their professional knowledge and communicate the positive things that are happening in their classrooms. Moreover, as Alphie indicated, HK.AR has increased the accountability of schools to parents because it requires teachers to diagnose, assess, and record students' grade levels in writing, and program for their individual needs. However, Deenie, Marcia and Joan, were not convinced of the need and practicality of the policy. They suggested that although HK.AR provided administrators with more comprehensive information about students and teachers, given the current demands on schools, it was not realistic.

According to Simmons (1994), outcomes-based accountability is the new reform principal in the United States. It is reflected in a results orientation which is supported by federal legislation to set standards (Willis, 1995). In Alberta, recent provincial government initiatives in education also reflect a results-oriented direction.

Factors relating to educational accountability must ultimately respond to the differences and individual needs of schools, business and communities together. Ironically however, in the quest to improve communication between the home and the school, the findings reveal that HK.AR may restrict some schools in their ability to promote innovative practice.

Resources. Inevitably, common hindrances such as lack of time, cost factors and training are increasingly demanding in this day and age of rapid technological advances and precipitous change. For Marcia and Joan, educators in a very progressive school, the detailed requirements of HK.AR did not connect well with MacDonald's self-developed assessment program which included comprehensive portfolios and a detailed system of parent-student-teacher interviews. As aforementioned, factors such as cost and time are always in need of consideration. In terms of people, time and money, HK.AR may have presented a particular challenge for some schools like MacDonald where teachers were already spending an enormous amount of time communicating student growth according to a method that they had successfully developed and implemented in the school before the advent of HK.AR. For Marcia, the regulation was more of an impediment to their progress because it "slowed them down." Marcia wondered what the teachers at MacDonald and elsewhere would be doing if the regulation didn't exist. Deenie also struggled with this dilemma, stating that comprehensive, curriculum-based report cards required an enormous amount of teachers' time. Not only that, but for schools that had purchased computer programs, there was a considerable cost factor as well. Although Deenie thought that more comprehensive reporting would be beneficial to students and parents, she did not believe that the HK.AR policy recognized the reality of schools' dwindling resources. She argued that more comprehensive systems for communicating student growth were not feasible for schools because the work exhausted teachers who were already finding it difficult to teach, assess students and record a tremendous amount of information. Moreover, new programs depleted the financial resources of schools due to the professional development needs of staff. There is not a great deal of research regarding the implementation of comprehensive assessment and reporting systems. However, recent studies which investigated school reporting changes also indicated challenges of time constraints, as well as human and financial resources (Guskey, 1994; Sperling, 1994). However, after having implemented a more comprehensive assessment and reporting program, many teachers found that new practices became more valuable and less stressful each year (Sperling, 1994). Whether or not this finding is applicable to HK.AR and its impact on teaching and learning in the Edmonton Public School District is unknown. The number of schools having participated in this study was not large enough to determine the full extent of the policy's impact on all schools in the district. Moreover, according to Nussbaumer (1977), the policy implementation process requires approximately five years. The HK.AR policy was first introduced to school in the Fall of 1994, therefore the realm of its impact on teaching and learning in schools throughout the district remains to be determined. What is clear, however, is that the values and beliefs of the principal has a definite influence on how the policy is implemented as well as its impact on teaching and learning. Teachers need the support and trust of administrators. According to the findings from this research combined with those in the literature, it is primarily the ability of teachers to demonstrate sophisticated pedagogical skills that will enhance programs for communicating student growth and improve student achievement in the district. This includes careful management of the curriculum, diagnostic and programming expertise, excellent communication skills and a professional conviction to help students learn better.

The Impact of HK.AR on Learning

Several factors emerged from the findings which were perceived to have resulted in a positive impact on student learning. They are related to the degree of communication between the home and the school and the student's sense of ownership for their learning. However, as reflected by the findings elsewhere, participants' perceptions were diametrically opposed to each other on the issue of the policy's impact in relation to learning. Some participants found that HK.AR had little or no impact: school practices were reflective of policy requirements prior to its completion. However, Deenie speculated that HK.AR may have resulted in a negative impact on learning. Concerns were expressed regarding the underlying messages that newer district assessment practices might communicate to students and parents as well as students' self-esteem. These findings will be discussed according to literature on communicating student growth as well as research completed in the area of student motivation and achievement.

Communication. The degree of communication between the home and the school influences student achievement. Whether HK.AR. has impacted the interchange of information between schools and parents in a positive way is not evident from the findings of this study. According to Marcia, routine items such as the school name, address, and district logo have standardized reporting formats in schools as a result of the HK.AR policy. However, both Marcia and Joan found that the quality of communication was not enhanced at

MacDonald School through HK.AR and that the policy did not result in any substantial changes in assessment and reporting. Marcia stated that communication between the home and the school requires much more than a written, outcomes-based reporting document. The MacDonald School philosophy promotes parent-teacher-student conferencing, portfolios, and ongoing relations with parents because these practices allow teachers to clarify misconceptions through direct contact and provide parents with exemplars of student growth and an opportunity to dialogue face-to-face with the teacher.

To be meaningful, grades must be interpreted by all members of a school community in the same way, and educators must keep records of them in ways which lend to communicating a more complete understanding of each student's progress (Seely, p.23). The more that schools are able to communicate openly with parents and students about achievement, the more clearly this information will be understood. According to Grant, Alphie and Richard, HK.AR fosters more "honest" communication to students and their parents about the learning process. Many teachers are willing to communicate and work with the parents of the students they teach. In fact some teachers capitalize on it because they experience, in return, increased parental support (Charles & Senter, 1995).

Grant and Alphie explained that teachers at Jackson School were uncomfortable initially with giving more honest feedback and making grade level statements. Likewise, they revealed that parents and students were uncomfortable receiving it. However, according to Wiggins (1993), more effective communication with students and parents is essential to improving student achievement. As reflected by a requirement of the HK.AR policy, more varied and sophisticated measures of student growth require students to synthesize and apply what they have learned and enable teachers to detect nuances of understanding indicative of how they think and process information (Charles & Senter, 1995). As a result, information communicated about student growth should reflect a holistic assessment of students' capabilities.

Effective communication informs, encourages, and supports, while ineffective communication leads to misunderstandings, antagonisms, and loss of confidence (Charles & Senter, 1995). Although the impact of communicating student growth remains a contentious issue for educators, this simple statement provides educators with important insights into enhancing student achievement.

Student ownership. Students need to take responsibility for their learning so that they can make meaningful choices (Kohn, 1994). Comprehensive assessment and reporting may provide students with the information they need to improve and progress. However, a school's reporting categories and feedback are only as good as the assessment system from which they are drawn (Wiggins, 1994). In other words, if the assessment practices of teachers within the school are not reflected in the reporting format, this information will not necessarily be more informative to the parent or the student.

Grant, Alphie and Richard found that information on more comprehensive assessment and reporting documents helped students to better understand information about their curricular strengths and their weaknesses. In terms of class assignments, projects and other tasks, Alphie stated that students were increasingly aware of teachers' expectations for their work and how it was to be completed: HK.AR enabled students to take a more active role in the learning process. As a result, learning was challenging and interesting.

Underlying connotations. Marcia was particularly concerned about underlying messages that new district assessment practices may impart.

Higher Level of Achievement tests are currently part of the district assessment program which requires teachers to judge student performance on tests in core subject areas. Marcia did not think that the district focus on core subjects was appropriate given the underlying message that non-core subjects are not important. Furthermore, she considered district-developed standards of achievement to be repetitive of those already developed and utilized by the province.

According to Wiggins (1994), grades are rarely representative of standards of achievement. Grades are earned in reference to individualized expectations, not fixed standards. However, to help parents know how their child is doing in relation to authentic and valid standards, scoring systems must be easily translated (p. 30). Accordingly, Grant found that HK.AR required teachers and parents to ask more meaningful questions in terms of grade levels of achievement, but that the most significant challenge for the district would be the development and implementation of performance levels indicative of standards of achievement. "Teachers need to know what the difference is between a 70 and an 80, as well as (between) a 71 and a 72," he stated, "HK.AR is helping us realize this."

Standarizing practices in schools can restrict the range of options open to teachers and principals and therefore, is not always conducive to enhancing teaching and learning. As options decrease, teachers and principals become less able to meet the individual needs of children and their parents (Sergiovanni, 1990, p. 25). Although conceptually dissimilar, this information is pertinent for advocates of performance standards in assessment. Schools attend to a variety of needs and abilities. For this reason, performance standards must be clear, concise, relevant and manageable. Moreover, they must not inhibit the flexibility that schools require in order to effectively communicate growth in ways which are reflective of their own philosophy about teaching and learning. Performance standards which meet these criterion will permit teachers to effectively use them, as well as students and teachers to more easily interpret and understand information about student growth.

Self-concept. Glasser (1969) contended that a sense of failure produced devastating effects on students and urged that schools strive to reduce the incidence of failure. It would appear that this information has not resulted in substantial results within schools however (Charles & Senter, 1995). Although HK.AR requires teachers to assess and report students' level of curriculum, the policy does not encourage student retention. Students make the transition from Kindergarten to grade twelve in age appropriate groupings unless stipulated otherwise by a child's parents. According to Deenie, HK.AR can be detrimental for low achieving students at the high school level in particular. She explained that these students are apt to quit school if they do not experience success or perceive that their schooling is worthwhile. Student self esteem was an issue raised by other participants as well. Grant and Alphie noted that teachers at Jackson School were apprehensive about how the grade level information would be perceived by students and their parents. According to Alphie, however, the grade level information was not a surprise for students who were below grade level because it was something that they already suspected. In fact, students and parents were pleased to have their suspicions confirmed.

Elaborating on earlier work in the area of student motivation and enhancing student achievement, Glasser (1990) asserted that students need schoolwork that is interesting and suited to their individual abilities and preferences or they will not make an effort to learn. He stated that criticism is counterproductive to increasing student motivation. This information is useful to consider in terms of communicating student growth. It is clear that positive relations between the home and the school requires cooperation between teachers, students and parents. To facilitate the learning process, communication must be constructive, reflect growth, and provide meaningful information about a student's strengths and needs. As stated by Wiggins (1993), "quality assessment and reporting should promote student growth."

Key to improving student achievement is a review of educational programs and policies to ensure that new practices reflect sound research. In terms of HK.AR, this requires ongoing analysis of the strengths and needs of the policy and its key players. The review process facilitates the development of creative solutions in response to challenges and concerns which develop as the change process unfolds.

Policy Review in Relation to HK.AR

An analysis of the findings on policy review in relation to HK.AR revealed a prevalence of information in two areas in particular. The first category encouraged further investigation in assessment and reporting practices. The second category contained recommendations which were more advisory in nature. In parallel with the discussions on policy development, policy implementation, and policy impact, these findings have been organized and discussed in relation to relevant literature on policy review. In order to reflect a more holistic analysis of the HK.AR policy, recommendations are presented in a fashion dissimilar to the way in which they were organized in the findings chapter. Recommendations are presented under four overriding principles. To maintain authenticity, topic headings are reflective of participants' comments. They are: "Don't Stop Here"; "Avoid the Fad Trap"; "Keep Communication

Open"; and "Keep It Simple."

"Don't stop here." The HK.AR policy reflects the findings of researchers such as Wiggins (1991, 1993, 1994) and Stiggins (1988, 1994) in the area of enhancing student achievement through comprehensive assessment and reporting. According to Grant, the district is making progress in improving learning through assessment and reporting reform. However, he added that there is much more work which remains. For example, the HK.AR policy requires that schools' reporting documents make provision for parent and student feedback. In turn, many schools have incorporated goal setting as an integral part of the progress report. At Jackson School, Grant recognized that there was a need to improve the goal setting process. Although students tried to set goals in relation to their needs and individual growth, teachers and students found that the time period between goal setting and review was too long. Consequently, the review process was ineffective and lacked meaning. Grant explained that shorter time periods helped students to more effectively monitor their growth. As a result, growth was more visible and the goal setting process more relevant for students and their parents. According to Dreikurs and Cassel (1972) teachers should help students to establish limits which they learn to impose upon themselves. In this way, they are able to learn self-control. Goal setting fosters independence, responsibility, and helps students learn to make good choices.

According to the literature, as well as comments from several participants, the development of performance standards–established criteria, rules or principles by which student performances are judged–is critical. Grant and Alphie expressed the concern that without performance standards, progress that has been made in assessment and reporting will be insignificant.

Grant affirmed that educators need to develop performance standards so that parents and students can accurately interpret and understand information about student growth. The use of simple reporting symbols may be efficient and easy to administer, but they are not very informative for parents and students who would like to know more (Brandt, 1994, p. 3). However, Wiggins (1994) noted that it is not the symbols that pose the problem, but the lack of specificity and clarity that is implicit in current assessment and reporting practices. For Wiggins, clear standards and criteria must be used in a consistent way by each teacher. Otherwise, they will not be able to verify and understand student scores: "the anchor products and the scoring guidelines" (p. 36).

Marcia cautioned that the current focus on developing performance standards is a concern because an excess of measurement references can result in another problem. She explained that educators must not get lost in weighing "the sheep" because they might spend so much time "measuring them" that they forget to "feed them." Consequently, the development of performance standards requires careful attention in order to ensure that teaching is uninterrupted and learning is enhanced.

"Avoid the fad trap." Educational reform is a product of the development and evolution of educational ideals, structures and programs. However, many attempts to reform education have failed. To ensure that changes enhance teaching and learning, policy makers must be wary of educational trends. However, it is difficult to distinguish between reforms which foreshadow the passing of an educational trend and those which reflect meaningful change. There is consensus on one premise: educational change requires extraordinary leadership (Sergiovanni, 1990).

Carver (1990) maintained that organizations are similar to individuals in that their values and principles determine specific decisions, behaviours and outcomes. If improving student achievement is at the forefront of the educational reform process, this principle will balance the implementation of new programs and policies while fostering ongoing, uninterrupted teaching and learning. To ensure that efforts remain focused on improving student achievement in the district, participants offered various suggestions regarding HK.AR and the policy process. Foremost, Richard and Alphie suggested that the district monitor and assess the progress of schools in implementing HK.AR. Richard felt that a clear plan for implementation within the schools was not effectively communicated to schools and that for this reason, there was a great deal of guesswork on the part of teachers. He would have appreciated more leadership from the district in terms of knowing how other schools were implementing the regulation. Rather than receiving a variety of templates from which the teachers and administrators were to develop a reporting document at Springfield, Richard would have preferred to have a district reporting format which could be transferable to all high schools. He thought that a common format would facilitate the transfer of information from one high school to another. Similarly, Alphie stated that teachers and administrators need to start asking better questions when transferring information from one school to another. He believed that self-reflection was key to improving practices in assessment and reporting and would enable teachers to contribute more effectively to the development of performance standards throughout the district.

On the other hand, Deenie wondered whether the HK.AR policy was feasible. Given the expense on teachers' time and schools' dwindling financial resources, Marcia explained that it was her goal to reduce these costs in order to increase teachers' time and reduce expenses to the school. Marcia, Deenie and Alphie questioned what schools would be doing to improve student achievement if so many resources were not spent on implementing more comprehensive reporting documents. All participants expressed similar concerns about the lack of resources.

In order to provide a holistic analysis of the impact of a policy, it is important to consider its direct costs as well as its intangible effects on the organization (Dye, 1975). Dye (p. 329) maintained that programs are most frequently measured in terms of their direct costs because it is very difficult to measure the benefits of a policy in terms of something intangible such as social or emotional well-being. He asserted however, "We cannot be content with measuring how many times a bird flaps its wings, we must assess how far the bird has flown" (p. 328). Although he recommended one's political intuition as being the best guide to review such effects, he stated that the policy review process should include five distinct categories. They are: (a) The impact of the policy on the target situation (b) The impact of the policy on situations or groups other than the target (c) The impact of the policy on future as well as immediate conditions (d) The impact of the policy in terms of direct costs [program resources] (e) The impact of the policy in terms of indirect costs, including the loss of opportunities to do other things (p. 328). The work of Dye, combined with participants' comments in relation to HK.AR, stipulate that school resources–human and financial–be factored into the policy review process. In this way, the impact of the HK.AR policy can be analyzed in relation to its real effect on teaching and learning.

"Keep communication open." Marcia captured the comments of several participants when she said that the communication process needed to be open. Richard asserted that professional development opportunities for teachers were necessary to facilitate the implementation of the regulation as well as any modifications which need to occur. He felt that teachers who were opposed to outcomes-based assessment and reporting did not understand the benefits of providing more detailed information to students. Moreover, he sensed that these teachers were frustrated because of the amount of time and resources that comprehensive assessment practices required. For the same reason, Marcia expressed that teachers needed to share stories of school successes in the area of communicating student growth. She speculated that if teachers were provided with a mechanism for dialogue, the result would be beneficial to the district. In terms of reviewing the impact of HK.AR on teaching and learning, her suggestion has merit.

Although we tend to think of communication as a written process, much of it is oral (Banbury & Herbert, 1992). Opportunities for ongoing and constructive communication can clarify misconceptions and reveal what is happening in other schools in terms of communicating student growth.

"Keep it simple." To reflect a holistic assessment of a policy's impact, the review process must involve the policy making community–district administrators, Board trustees, school council representatives, the Superintendent of Schools–as well as the organization's stake holders–teachers, administrators, parents, students. According to a provincial representative of the Alberta Teachers' Association, however, one of the greatest frustrations with reform policies in education, is lack of consultation with the "practitioners" (Flower, 1996). For this reason, policy makers benefit if they directly address classroom practices from the point of view of individual teachers. Otherwise, the change process will continue to yield poor results (Hall & Carter, 1995).

According to Dye (1975) a major problem confronting anyone who wants to evaluate a public policy is to determine what the goals of the policy are. But groups often pursue incompatible goals to satisfy a variety of stake holders. As a result, there is little agreement on the goals of policies which are applied in a public context (p.332). The HK.AR policy appears to have a variety of corollary goals: improving communication between the home and the school; cultivating a standardized approach to assessing and communicating student growth; providing administrators with more information about staff and students; encouraging teachers to use alternate ways of assessing and evaluating their students; amplifying the use of curriculum in the teaching and learning process. No matter what the corollary goals of HK.AR may be, they must complement district priorities, the fundamental principle of which is to improve student achievement.

Teachers should be kept informed about policies which affect teaching and learning. However, teachers should also keep themselves informed of educational changes that are occurring. This is particularly important given the implications for teaching and learning. Combined with effective communication and careful policy review, these conditions foster progress and facilitate effective change.

Chapter VI: Conclusions, Recommendations, and Personal Reflections

This chapter consists of five sections. In the first section, factors to be considered when reviewing the findings of the overall study are outlined. The second section addresses the research questions through a synthesis of the findings, the literature, and my own experiences as a teacher and as a researcher. The third section contains conclusions which are explicitly linked to the research findings. To operationalize the findings, the fourth section highlights proposed recommendations for each conclusion. The chapter concludes with final reflections about the study and educational assessment in the future.

Factors to Consider

When reviewing the results of a study, it is important to consider variables which may have affected the research findings. As aforementioned, the context and nature of this research were best suited to a method comprised of qualitative techniques. However, as with any study, a fair review of the findings requires an awareness of the research design in order to assess factors which may have influenced data. When reviewing the results of this study, the reader must consider three variables in particular: the research participants, the design, and the researcher.

Research Participants

Factors which may have influenced the sample include the method used to obtain the participants, the technique used to select participants, characteristics of the participants, and the number of participants.

The schools selected for this study were required to have comprehensive assessment and reporting practices in line with the HK.AR administrative regulation. Participants were selected according to two techniques. First, an administrative representative of the district's central office staff nominated schools with reputable programs for assessing and reporting student growth. His interpretation of a "comprehensive assessment and reporting system" may have been different from that held by others. It is likely that the findings would have been different if other schools were selected. Secondly, participants were selected deliberately. A snowball sampling technique was used to identify participants: a representative from the school district nominated reputable schools; in each school, the principal nominated teachers who were knowledgeable about HK.AR. It is also likely that the participants responded to interview questions in ways perceived to be favoured by the employer. Although participants were assured of confidentiality, these factors suggest that the method used to obtain the sample, as well as the method used to select each of the participants, merits consideration. Although the perceptions of the participants may have significance beyond the realm of this study, the findings should be transferred to other contexts cautiously.

Participants consisted of teachers and administrators who had direct experience with the HK.AR administrative regulation. All were educators who were involved with the implementation of the regulation at the school level. This is a factor which may also have influenced the findings. Moreover, the data revealed that half of the participants fully supported HK.AR while the other half did not. Although there was an even distribution of participants' responses, this was unanticipated. It is possible that a different distribution of responses might have lead to other findings.

Finally, the sample size is also a factor to consider when reviewing the findings. For this study, a total of twelve interviews were conducted. However, the data became saturated after only six interviews. The information from the remaining interviews was not used due to data saturation.

Although precautions were taken to minimize errors, qualitative studies are naturally highly subjective. For this reason, the method must be carefully considered to ensure that the research reflects ethical practice and accurate results.

Design

This research utilized grounded theory according to the interpretive method of inquiry. As a result, this study was highly particularistic by the nature of its design. Categories and themes were derived from the findings. Therefore, they are grounded in the data. The interview transcripts were verified by another source to ensure that categories accurately reflected the data. However, if the study had been conducted by another researcher, it is probable that some categories and themes would have been different. Again, although these caveats are typical of qualitative research, they must be considered in order to militate against wrongful interpretations of the results.

Researcher

Other variables worthy of consideration are the experience and biases of the researcher in conducting a study of this nature. This was my first experience conducting research using the grounded theory method. Consequently, my interview skills and organizational techniques became more refined throughout the span of this study as a result of trial and error .

Moreover, as both a researcher and a teacher employed by Edmonton Public Schools, I sometimes found myself in conflicting roles. Although measures were taken to understand my presuppositions, this is another element which must be considered when reviewing the findings. In the early stages of my research, I assumed the role of a participant observer. In 1993, I conducted a pilot study concerning the implementation of HK.AR within the school that I was working. This study involved questionnaires about the school reporting system which were distributed to parents, teachers, and students. The result of this pilot study was a plan for a revised school assessment and reporting program. Working with parents, students, and school staff enabled me to collect information from a broad range of perspectives. Consequently, the experience influenced my understanding of the regulation and its potential impact on teaching and learning in other schools in the district. However, the risk of researcher bias increases when conducting research within one's own realm of experience. To ensure that the data were grounded in the reality of the participants, I was mindful of my personal biases throughout this investigation. Although it was challenging not to agree or to disagree with the participants during telephone conversations and interview sessions, this skill improved as the research process unfolded.

Research Questions

Two fundamental questions guided this study: (a) How has HK.AR influenced pedagogy and student growth in schools which were perceived to have effectively implemented the administrative regulation? and (b) What are the perceived effects of the regulation on teachers, administrators, students, and parents?

The sub-problems consisted of the following questions: (a) How has HK.AR been implemented? (b) What are the strengths and challenges of HK.AR? (c) What are the side effects of HK.AR? (d) Has HK.AR improved inter-school transferability of progress report marks? (e) How has HK.AR influenced student assessment? (f) How has HK.AR influenced reporting? (g) What revisions or recommendations for change might increase the effectiveness of communicating student growth within the district?

The thoughts and beliefs expressed are not necessarily representative of the district philosophy, nor do they necessarily denote substantive pedagogical research on the part of the respondents. Any generalizations are based on my personal opinions as an educator and as a researcher.

In this section, the sub-problems will be addressed sequentially. Then, the two fundamental research questions will be answered in relation to the findings.

How has HK.AR been implemented?

It appears that the implementation process of HK.AR has been much more sophisticated in some schools than in others. While some participants revealed that teachers utilized highly standardized tasks for assessing and communicating student growth within their school, others reflected a philosophy which was driven by variety and individual differences. Moreover, the use of computer technology for the reporting process appears to be very different from one site to another. For example, while discussing the regulation with one participant, she "opened" her computer and accessed a file containing a student's achievement profile, complete with detailed information about their effort, curricular level, and growth. In another school, however, I interviewed participants in a room alongside a table containing several hundred "bubble-sheet" reporting documents –these provided only simple descriptions about student progress which did not specify curriculum outcomes or grade level information.

The complexity and scope of HK.AR–from ideology to practice–precludes the development of any one theory to successfully explain these occurrences. However, it is clear that a variety of factors influenced the implementation process. These include the role of the administrator, the technological expertise of teachers, as well as resources and parental support.

What are the strengths and challenges of HK.AR?

A synthesis of the positive and negative influences of HK.AR in relation to the fundamental research problem–its impact on teaching and learning–can be found in Tables II and III. The findings reveal that HK.AR has visibly impacted practices within schools in the district. However, in relation to pedagogy, it appears that the implications of the policy for teachers and its benefits in terms of teaching and learning form an imbalance. This point was expressed by Deenie and Marcia. Both principals were particularly concerned about the direct effect of the policy on teachers, as well as its indirect effects on the learning process and student achievement. Although the policy appears to have interesting benefits in terms of improving teaching and enhancing learning, provisions must be made so that teachers' energies are not expended on time-consuming tasks such as record keeping and data entry. Although necessary, these tasks can be completed without sophisticated pedagogical knowledge. In terms of their visual impact, the summaries of positive and negative influences of HK.AR on teaching and learning (Appendices H and I) are particularly helpful. The findings suggest that the regulation is an integral part of improving student achievement in the district. However, to truly maximise student achievement in the district, challenges which have been identified in this study need to be addressed.

Table II
Synthesis of findings: Positive influences of HK.AR on Teaching and Learning

TEACHING	LEARNING
1. Communication is enhanced -more similarity between schools -benefits students who transfer schools	1. More comprehensive assessment and reporting strategies clarify learning for students
2. More comprehensive reporting -administrative tool / more detail	2. Quality of communication remains undecided. Communication between schools appears to have benefited
3. Good teaching strategies are reinforced -students are better equipped to experience success	3. More "honest" communication - past reporting did not always provide a truthful reflection of grade level
4. Forces teachers/administrators to reconsider beliefs and practices in assessment & reporting -HK.AR is only the beginning	4. Parents receive more complete information about what their children are learning/ areas which require improvement -facilitates remedial and enrichment work
5. More innovative ways of assessing what children are learning -Peer and self-assessment, goal-setting, rubrics, performance-based assessment	5. Parents more accurately informed where their child is in relation to the curriculum
6. Increased curricular knowledge and assessment skills of teachers -variety of assessment strategies -improved communication skills for conferences with parents and students	6. Students have more thorough understanding of their strengths and weaknesses (e.g. growth) and can use this information to enhance their learning -learning styles
7. Higher level of accountability -challenges teachers to know detailed information about each student's growth -forces teachers to know various levels of curriculum, diagnose grade level information as well as individual learner's abilities	7. Students viewed as active participants in their learning -school more interesting/ more motivating -greater chance of success for students
8. Encourages more use of technology -encourages staff to use computers -introduction to a variety of programs	8. Ownership: students exhibit greater ownership when they have more knowledge and know their growth is being monitored -comprehensive information -have more involvement in their program -differentiated programming
9. Challenges teachers to challenge students	
10. Instruction is provided at appropriate level	
11. Teacher supervision by administration -assesses teacher strengths/weaknesses -monitors teacher performance -distinguishes between effective/ ineffective teachers	

Table III
Synthesis of findings: Challenges of HK.AR on Teaching and Learning

TEACHING

1. Teacher Stress
-information "overload"
-nebulous origins
-lack of input

2. Time Requirements
-school reporting systems require too much teacher time
-reporting process: technology/information management is cumbersome in some schools

3. HK.AR not reflective of assessment beliefs and practices in some schools
-risk of restricting innovative activities in "cutting-edge" schools
-technical information that was not required in the past (dates, attendance, name, grade level) may endanger high-risk students

4. Cost factor
-feasibility
-technology
-professional development

5. Technology
-programs required to run application are problematic
-lack of technical personnel slows schools down

6. Various levels of implementation/ Inconsistency
-administrator's attitude
-high school/ junior high / elementary level
-range of marks: open to interpretation

7. Site-based decision making
-regulation not decentralized
-uniformity is a weakness

8. Resources
-human/financial/time

9. Issues of teacher self-esteem

10. Level of complexity
-teachers versus assessors

LEARNING

1. Students lack one-on-one support
-amount of time that teachers can spend with students on remedial/enrichment or one-on-one work is minimal

2. Level of discomfort: Students and parents receiving negative feedback
-language about curricular achievement is not always clear
-report card information can be easily misunderstood

3. "Honest" reporting may lower students'
self-esteem
- "at-risk" students may quit school

What are the side effects of HK.AR?

HK.AR has resulted in three major side effects which can be inferred from the data. These include: (a) higher levels of stress due to more comprehensive assessment and reporting of student learning, (b) a critical need for parental and community support within the school and within the district, and (c) implications for teacher education programs to adequately equip preservice teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to assess and communicate student growth in ways which improve student achievement.

It is not surprising that HK.AR has resulted in mixed reactions from those required to implement it. Appropriate provisions to alleviate pressures within classrooms and schools will ensure that HK.AR invokes the kind of stress that energizes and excites teachers. Aside from pedagogical, organizational, and management skills, educators need the time and support to accomplish tasks that enhance learning. The conclusions and recommendations section of this chapter further addresses these issues.

Has HK.AR improved inter-school transferability of progress report marks?

The findings reveal that HK.AR has not influenced the transferability of information between schools. If inter-school transferability of student marks is a desired outcome of HK.AR, the application of consistent standards is required. As expressed by Alphie, this necessitates the use of clear language and common descriptors among schools, otherwise it is difficult to interpret and to understand essential information about students' levels of achievement. Inter-school transferability of progress report marks is increasingly important as statistics indicate that the number of Canadians who are changing professions and relocating to other areas of the country is growing.

How has HK.AR influenced assessment and reporting?

With the advent of HK.AR and the performance assessment movement, it is evident that strategies for assessing and reporting student growth have changed. In accordance with the requirements of the regulation, the skills of teachers to diagnose and prescribe programs which are suited to the needs of individual students have improved as well. For schools with comprehensive assessment and reporting plans, communication between the home and the school is extensive. It appears that the district focus on communicating student growth has increased the potential for better communication between teachers, between schools, and perhaps, between districts.

What might increase the effectiveness of communicating student growth within the district?

It appears that while some reporting practices vary substantially from one school to another, others are very similar. Although a degree of flexibility is important in order to foster educational innovation, there needs to be more specificity in some aspects of the district regulation. The current regulation requires that schools report students' grade level of achievement at least once a year. There is no specification as to when this is to be done. Moreover, some schools are reporting student grade level information several times per year, while others choose to do so only once per year. Because some schools are implementing minimally the HK.AR regulation, it is important that those minima result in maximum benefits. Evidently, this is an efficiency issue.

It is evident that information about grade level of achievement is most meaningful if the information is communicated at a time when teachers, parents, and students can discuss the information and work together to help students experience success. However, if schools choose to report grade level of achievement information solely at the end of the academic year, the communication process is disrupted and mechanisms for parents and students to act on the information are reduced.

How has HK.AR influenced pedagogy and student growth in schools which were perceived to have effectively implemented the HK.AR regulation?

The literature and the research findings of this study suggest that HK.AR enhances teaching in schools where the regulation has been effectively implemented. Although policies change some of the circumstances in which we work, they cannot change all of the circumstances (Ball, 1994). Unquestionably however, HK.AR has had an impact on practices in schools within the district. As indicated in both the findings as well as the synthesis of the regulation's impact on teaching and learning, the ramifications of HK.AR for pedagogy are considerable. Although the literature reveals that the implementation process of a policy requires approximately five years before its impact can be assessed, changes in teaching and learning are evident. To discuss these changes would be to reiterate what has already been discussed in chapter four. If the policy is modified to reflect necessary improvements, and if schools provide teachers with the support and resources they require, the overall benefits for education far outweigh the regulation's potential to negatively influence pedagogy.

The impact of the regulation on student achievement, however, is more difficult to ascertain. Implemented in 1994, the regulation has not been in effect long enough to permit substantive conclusions regarding the effects of more comprehensive assessment and reporting on student learning and achievement. Of course, as aforementioned in chapter five, the "trickle-down effect" suggests that learning is facilitated through the detailed information that HK.AR requires.

What are the perceived effects of the regulation on teachers, administrators, parents, and students?

Researchers and educators have long known that professional growth is best achieved through self-directed, low-risk professional development opportunities which enable teachers to assess and refine their pedagogical skills and enhance their knowledge of curriculum-related issues. Until recent years, however, traditional methods of teacher supervision have resulted in minimal improvements in teaching. Despite the impersonal nature of written policy, HK.AR and other grade level reporting have resulted in many changes in teaching. Not only does HK.AR require more sophisticated communication skills, it also appears to have strengthened teachers' beliefs in their pedagogical abilities. Teachers are required to assess, diagnose, report, and prescribe grade level appropriate material for students in their classrooms. Moreover, they must provide individualized programming suited to each student's needs. This process forces teachers to extend their professional capacity. From a managerial perspective, this is quite unique.

The HK.AR regulation enables principals to be more effective in their role as lead teachers. The findings indicate that the regulation can help administrators identify staff strengths and areas of need. Factors such as increased accountability and more sophisticated assessment and reporting skills help good teachers become even better. In fact, HK.AR might also be a matter of managerial practicality for principals and district administrators. Not only does the regulation serve as a tool for building and enhancing teachers' professional growth, it encourages flexibility and accountability through less direct supervision.

HK.AR was revised as a result of a growing call from the parent community for more meaningful information regarding student growth (Armstrong, D., personal communication, May 10, 1996). Before the revision of the regulation on communicating student growth, reporting documents did not contain detailed information about student progress. The original regulation was more open to interpretation than the revised regulation. Now, however, teachers must report each students' grade level of achievement in writing, making direct reference to curricular expectations. As well, they must communicate methods for assessing and evaluating student achievement to students and their parents. Although some changes are required in order to increase the transferability of information from one school to another, overall, HK.AR has resulted in more standardized reporting documents. As a result, reporting information is more easily interpreted – not only by parents and staff as they move from one location to another, but for the students themselves.

Due to HK.AR, students have more information about their learning and the ways in which they are being assessed. Consequently, they are much more actively involved in the learning process. Through HK.AR, students' opportunities for individual reflection and goal setting activities have increased. Sophisticated pedagogical techniques have increased teachers' capacities to offer students more choice in terms of assessment and individualized enrichment tasks. Most importantly, if students know they are being monitored and that objectives and assessment criteria are clear, they will take more ownership for their learning. In fact, because the entire educational process has become more focussed on the student, learning has become more motivating.

Conclusions

The literature suggests that despite delays which appear to be characteristic of policy implementation, the process requires five years before its effects can be measured with any significance (LeTourneau, 1981; Nussbaumer, 1994). To date, therefore, the results of this study are inconclusive. However, in response to the policy process thus far, the findings do identify some interesting issues and challenges. In this section, four main issues are identified and discussed. Later, recommendations are provided to indicate possible directions for future assessment-related reform.

First, inconsistencies exist among schools with respect to reporting student growth. The regulation requires that schools report grade level of achievement information once per school year. This can be done at the beginning of the school year, or at the end. While some schools provide written progress reports to students and parents three times per year, others provide this information four times or more. Moreover, some schools report grade level of achievement information once per year while others report it for each reporting period. Although the current regulation does not specify the time of the year that grade level of achievement information is to be provided, there is speculation that this kind of information is most useful at the beginning of the academic year, when children, their parents, and their teachers are able to work together and set goals for growth and success. As expressed by one participant, information about student progress needs to be on-going, user-friendly and accessible to parents and students whenever needed. More specificity about frequency issues in district reporting requirements would increase the consistency with which reporting is done in schools.

Second, the information generated and communicated to students about their growth has increased. However, whether or not the regulation results in increased student achievement in the district will depend on how clearly information about growth is communicated and how well it this information is then interpreted and utilized by teachers, parents and students. Clear standards of student performance and a language that is easily interpreted by all members of the learning community are critical.

A third issue and challenge for schools experiencing educational reforms in assessment is that they are also trying to balance the advent of increasing technology and decreasing resources with the challenge of improving student achievement. As a result, teachers and administrators need support to effectively deal with the multitude of changes. Because the need for enhanced assessment-related strategies and materials such as rubrics, self-assessment tasks, and goal-setting is growing, the knowledge and skills required for teachers to be able to use them are increasing as well. As suggested in the findings, teachers must be able to assess, evaluate and provide feedback on an ongoing basis to further improve student achievement through communicating student growth.

Lastly, the findings suggest that the attitudes, beliefs and skills of principals significantly affect the change process. In this study, the principal's willingness and ability to lead the school community to a comprehensive assessment and reporting plan influenced the degree of implementation of the regulation within the school. Consequently, the principal was an influential figure in determining the degree of impact of HK.AR within the school. Transferred to improving student achievement in the district, the role of the principal is vital to enhancing teaching and learning.

Recommendations

Associated with each conclusion is a recommendation. In total, there are four recommendations which enact the conclusions. These recommendations relate to theory, to practice, or to both.

Short and long term monitoring of the effects of the HK.AR regulation on teaching and learning is essential. Because ongoing research and development is an integral part of effective policy making, the school district must be committed to planning and monitoring the change process, and to making adjustments to support assessment and reporting-related issues as they develop. However, due to the discrepancies between policy and practice, information about assessment and reporting needs to be compiled, discussed, and reviewed. Systematic research and analysis will advance HK.AR to the next phase of its development, resulting in further improvements to teaching and learning.

The findings indicate that the regulation would better meet the needs of students through specifying the frequency with which grade level reporting is done as well as the time(s) during which this information is best communicated. Grade level information is particularly meaningful at the beginning of the academic year because children, parents, and teachers are able to devise plans to work together and set goals for growth and success. Diagnostic assessments, grade level information, and collaborative goal setting involving the student, the teacher, and the parent can be particularly constructive learning mechanisms at the initial stages of the school year. Such proactive strategies enable teachers, students and parents to discuss progress plans at a time and in a way which fosters equitable opportunities for student growth. Moreover, if planning for student success is done at the beginning of the school year, alternative achievement programs – often accomplished during the summer months – can be recognized. In this way, students who may not have received an acceptable grade at the end of the school year might have a better chances of completing a higher grade level programming for the upcoming year. The implications of this recommendation highlight a need for professional development for teachers and administrators in three key areas.

Effective and collaborative goal setting strategies are necessary for teachers, parents and students to enact individual progress plans and monitor achievement. The findings suggest that short term goal setting is more effective than long term goal setting in helping students and teachers monitor student growth. The implications for instructional strategies encompass all subject areas. As a result, strategies for effective goal setting can be explored by district leadership staff who can provide direction to schools. In relation to this, there is a need for assessment resources to support teachers in diagnosing grade level information. Today's teachers need practical assessment resources which are inexpensive, require little preparation and are simple to use. Cumulative, performance-based tasks which assess curricular outcomes can be motivating for both the teacher and the student. However, the development of quality assessment tasks requires a great deal of time – time that most teachers do not have. As a result, there is a second implication for district leadership staff to make such resources available to teachers. The development and accessibility of quality assessment materials is critical if teachers are expected to deliver instructional programs which both monitor and improve student achievement. Moreover, if parents and students are able to access personal progress data on an ongoing basis, information about student learning can be reinforced at home. This leads to a third implication for district services as many teachers and administrators need professional development to develop and refine technology-related skills. Currently, computers cannot provide the sole means for accessing student progress reports because all families do not have access to a personal computer and many parents are not computer literate. However, with all schools in the district now having access to the Internet, skilful alterations to existing computer programs can provide yet another link between homes and schools for those students, parents and educators who are interested or able to operate them. Although computers can be valuable "tools" to facilitate communication between educators, students and parents, any changes should be initially implemented on a small scale. In this way, problems can be assessed, alterations can be made, and successful programs can be transferred to other contexts.

Schools communicate information about individual growth according to curriculum expectations. However, to ensure that achievement-related information is interpreted in similar ways by **all** members of the learning community, standards – the criterion or "benchmarks" which measure grade level of achievement – need to be revised, reinforced and clearly communicated throughout the educational system. This has widespread implications for students, parents, district personnel and the board as each body is inextricably linked to the other. To begin with, district information about student growth must be clear, concise, and easily interpreted by members of the school and the community. Similarly, district approved assessment tasks should contain rubrics which are simple to use, have a narrow margin of interpretation, and accurately communicate student growth according to curricular outcomes. The transferability of student information from one school to another will increase only if assessment materials are developed and monitored within specific guidelines.

Integrating widespread change into a preestablished system requires a balanced, systemic approach to the allocation of resources, time, and attention to all phases of the change process. This calls for leadership, flexibility, and attention to the individual needs of each component of the organization. At the micro-level, as teachers experiment with alternatives to enhance childrens' understanding about their learning, the need for "user-friendly" assessment tasks including rubrics, self-assessment and goal setting activities is increasing. To support classroom instruction, professional development opportunities which help teachers develop, write and use these techniques are essential. Collecting and sharing "exemplars", samples of student work that demonstrate grade level performance, can better equip teachers to diagnose and prescribe learning material to meet the range of individual needs. Teachers need to share samples of grade level work as well as samples of work that are above or below expectations with students. This helps students to identify standards of acceptable and unacceptable work. At the macro-level, an infrastructure which is designed to foster open communication throughout the district must be reinforced to enable parents, students, teachers, trustees, administrators, and the greater community to develop a shared understanding of achievement-related issues and clear standards for student performance. Leadership staff can play a vital role in enhancing teaching and learning. However, efficient and effective leadership requires team work, clear and definite channels of communication, a common understanding of the needs and priorities of the district, and incentives to keep staff focused on district goals. Teachers require practical resources to assess and diagnose grade level information. Although a centralized instructional resources library, furnished by publishers' donations of modern resources, educational journals, and the latest computer assisted learning material might increase teachers' accessibility to new and exciting teaching materials, leadership is required. Translated to the district, the findings indicate that there is a need for a centrally approved resource development initiative in assessment related materials. However, to heighten the value of such an endeavour, direction to the resource development team needs to come from others within the district. This will occur through thoughtful planning, systematic development and careful implementation of innovative assessment and reporting strategies.

Currently, there is a district priority to "enhance the partnership between the home and the school." However, in an age of public relations, enhancing relationships throughout the entire community of learners – including within the district – is critical. Therefore, a revision of the current district priority needs to reflect the interdependent nature of educational partnerships within society. In written format, the priority might be the following: "to enhance the partnership between the home and the school, and to strengthen public relations between the community, the school, and the district." Such a revision might better direct schools in ways which highlight the importance of public relations in education.

Personal Reflections

As stated in the introduction, the HK.AR regulation reflects a call for outcomes-based accountability in education. The literature indicates that assessment reform in Edmonton Public Schools has been further reinforced by provincial legislation which requires that all schools report student's grade level of achievement in core subjects from kindergarten to grade nine (Alberta Education, 1994). However, to more fully understand the impact of HK.AR on teaching and learning, one must consider the regulation within the broader economic and political context of society.

External factors considered, the findings suggest that the regulation has resulted in significant changes in teaching and learning. Supporters of HK.AR agree that its effects on schools have been substantial, leading to a new emphasis on communicating student growth, a more serious approach to assessment and evaluation practices, and increased accountability of schools to students, parents, and the community. HK.AR places an onus on schools to initiate stronger relationships, most notably with parents, community groups, and faculties of education. However, as discussed in chapter five, the pressure to strengthen relationships is increasingly imperative within circles other than education. For example, in the quest to compete in the global market, government agencies, sports franchises, and business groups are also seeking alliances and partnerships. While external tensions have intensified the need for schools to become increasingly responsive, the incentive for educators to please students and parents has increased due to internally imposed regulations such as HK.AR.

Although teaching can be very rewarding, it is increasingly difficult for teachers and administrators to balance the needs of their students with the pressures of the workplace. Combined with educational trends, curriculum changes, decreasing funds for routine materials, and increasing pupil-teacher ratios, teaching is a job that can extend far beyond the classroom. Moreover, today's inclusive classrooms are filled with high-needs students. Parental demands, societal pressures, and a growing emphasis on professional development in instructional technology, are an overwhelming challenge for teachers and educational administrators. No wonder parental and societal criticisms of the educational community are sometimes ill received. There is no doubt that the stress resulting from these kinds of pressures can be harmful to teaching and learning– especially if educators feel they can no longer meet the demands of the job. However, some stress can also have a positive impact in the workplace.

Market pressures and other political and fiscal tensions have provided the catalyst for educational reform in Alberta. Because of this, one thing has become increasingly clear. In spite of these forces and their subsequent influences on education, the ability of stake holder groups to communicate effectively and work collaboratively will determine whether current change initiatives in education are successful. Efficient teachers delegate simple tasks, monitor meeting times, minimize paperwork, and avoid trivial activities. However, even efficient teachers need classroom support in order to be effective. Supportive parents, community volunteers and student teachers can be excellent resources. Although there are issues of confidentiality which must be considered, some recording and filing of student information can be done by parent volunteers or paraprofessionals. In fact, students themselves can be trained to assist in keeping records of their progress. However, issues related to the privacy of student information must not be neglected or provisions for increased support can be unfavourable. Combined with a public relations-oriented approach to progressive education, research and development of influential regulations such as HK.AR can lead schools to the next level of enhancing student achievement through communicating student growth.

To investigate policy and its implications when applied to real situations is a challenge. To consider its implications for people and systems is even more complex. In conducting this research, I have attempted to do both. This is misleading in itself. Real life cannot be neatly packaged into logical sequential conclusions. Although we may study policies, analyse trends, and try to forecast answers for the future, there is no guarantee in such predictions, nor is there an ideal answer.

There are significant changes occurring in schools. However, whether these changes are founded in economics, politics, or technology, they must be based on sound pedagogical principles, ethical research, and the needs of children. Prior to this study, little research had been completed in the area of assessment and evaluation-related policy. It is hoped that this thesis may provide pertinent information to those interested in educational change–more particularly to those interested in the impact of comprehensive assessment and reporting plans on teaching and learning. Through an ongoing process which encourages meaningful communication, collaborative partnerships, as well as progressive assessment and reporting programs, teaching and learning will ultimately benefit.

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Appendix A:
HK.AR (1991)

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CODE: HK.AR

EFFECTIVE DATE: 23-01-1991

TOPIC: Student Achievement and Growth

ISSUE DATE: 29-01-1991

REVIEW DATE: 01-1996

1. The district shall administer measures of achievement to assist in determining whether district standards are being met.

2. Each school shall develop a plan to assess and communicate student achievement and growth. This plan shall include the use of a progress report, as well as other means of communication.

3. School plans for assessing student achievement shall include a variety of techniques such as teacher observation, teacher interview, oral and written tests, practical assignments, teacher developed tests, district achievement tests, and published standardized tests.

4. Measures used to assess and evaluate student achievement and growth shall be based on the outcomes and expectations, the student's stage of learning and learning styles. They shall be designed to enhance students' feelings of self-worth.

5. Each school shall communicate to students and their parents or guardians information about curriculum and procedures for assessing, evaluating and communicating student growth.

6. Teachers shall have the responsibility for assessing, evaluating and communicating student achievement and growth.

7. Each school shall establish and make known to students and parents or guardians an appeal process which is consistent with district requirements.

Reference(s): HK.BP, HK.BR, IO.AR
School Act, 1988, S. 13(e)

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION

RESCISSION

Appendix B:
HK.AR (Revised Regulation)

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CODE: HK.AR

EFFECTIVE DATE: 11-05-1995

TOPIC: Communicating Student Achievement and Growth

ISSUE DATE: 12-09-1995

REVIEW DATE: 05-2000

A. DEFINITION OF TERMS

grade - level of achievement

achievement - demonstration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes students are expected to learn at a specified grade level

performance - how well a student demonstrates grade level expectations

effort - demonstration of feelings and motivation for learning

growth - evidence of positive change in student achievement over time

curriculum standards - the expected student learnings sequenced into grade levels against which student performance is judged

B. GENERAL

1. The district shall provide measures to assist in determining individual student achievement. Measures used to assess and evaluate student achievement shall be based on the expectations defined in the curriculum.
2. Teachers shall use a variety of methods to assess individual student achievement and growth. These methods may include teacher observation, oral and written tests, performance assessments, teacher developed tests, district achievement tests, and externally developed standardized tests. The methods for assessing and evaluating student achievement and growth shall be communicated to students and parents.
3. Teachers shall communicate to students and parents the grade level of curriculum for each course in which students are enrolled and plans for student programming.
4. Each school shall have a written plan to assess, evaluate and communicate student achievement that is to be provided to students and parents.
5. A copy of each school's plan, reporting schedule, and progress report shall be kept on hand in each school and updated annually.

6. Each school shall establish and make known to students and parents a process for making an appeal about information in the written progress report. The appeal shall be made to the principal who will render a decision and report the findings to the individual making the appeal. If the individual is not satisfied with the decision, the principal shall advise the individual that a further appeal may be made to the superintendent.

7. Each school shall establish at least three regular reporting periods per school year. A written progress report shall be provided for each reporting period.

8. Information about the grade level of achievement and how well the student is demonstrating grade level expectations shall be reported in the written progress report.

9. Information about effort and attitudes shall be reported by either oral or written comments.

10. Information about individual student growth shall be reported by oral or written comments and supported by student work.

C. PROGRESS REPORTS

1. The progress report shall include the following:

   - school name, address, and phone number
   - district logo
   - statement of district mission
   - record of student attendance and punctuality
   - year-end recommendation about student programming
   - provision for parent and student input and response
   - provision for school or parent initiated conference
   - name or signature of the teacher and principal
   - an identification of the grade level of achievement demonstrated by the student for each course of study at the end of each school year

- information about quality of performance compared to curriculum standards and reported by letter grades, percentage grades, or descriptors as follows:

Letter Grades	Percentage Grades	Descriptors
A	80 - 100	Work meets standard of excellence
B	65 - 79	Work exceeds acceptable standard
C	50 - 64	Work meets acceptable standard
D*	0 - 49	Work does not meet acceptable standard

(* F to be used at high school level)

2. A copy of each written progress report shall be placed in the student record.

Reference(s): AE.BP - District Mission; HK.BP - Student Achievement and Growth; HK.BR - Student Achievement and Growth; IB.AR - Student Placement, Programming and Appeals; IO.AR - Student Records; JBA.AR - Visual Identity Program; School Act, 1988, Section 13(e)

Appendix C
Information Letter

Dear ____________________,

I am a teacher with Edmonton Public schools and am currently on professional leave for one year. Being a graduate student at the University of Alberta, I am conducting a study on the implications and effects of HK.AR on administrators, teachers, parents and students within the Edmonton Public School District. As you are probably aware, HK.AR is the revised regulation concerning communicating student growth. The Director of Assessment, EPSB, has nominated you as a potential candidate for this study. However, you may chose not to participate if you so wish.

The general purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' and administrators' perceptions and opinions regarding the implementation and effects of HK.AR in the district . Particular emphasis will be given to determining the following items:
(i) the effects of HK.AR on teaching and learning;
(ii) the implications of HK.AR for students, parents, teachers and administrators.
Should you choose to be a participant, I would like to interview you for approximately forty five minutes to an hour. You will be provided with a copy of the interview questions prior to the meeting. You may wish to opt out of any questions with which you are not comfortable. I would also like you to nominate two teachers who are members of your staff and have at least two years experience in assessing and reporting student growth at your school. However, I will select only one teacher from your staff for an interview. Again, the interview is anticipated to last approximately forty five minutes.

To date, there has been limited systematic information gathered about administrators' and teachers' responses to HK.AR regarding the effects of the regulation on students and parents. This research is essential to generate practical information for the central office personnel who developed and implemented the revised regulation as well as district educators who are interested in its effects on teaching and learning. The information in this study will be beneficial not only to those concerned with consistency in reporting student growth within the system, but also to educators, researchers and theoreticians who are monitoring changes in assessment and reporting practices.

If you would like a copy of the results of the study upon completion, I would be happy to provide you with one. I will be in contact with you in the near future. Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. I look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Beverley Lyseng

Appendix D
Interview Schedule (Copy for Participant)

Primary Research Problem

1. How has HK.AR influenced pedagogy and student growth from the perspectives of teachers and administrators in schools which have successfully implemented the regulation?

2. What are the perceived effects of HK.AR on teachers, administrators, students and parents in schools which have successfully implemented the regulation ?

Interview Questions:

1. How has HK.AR been implemented at your school?

2. Has HK.AR influenced teaching at your school? If so, how? In the district?

3. Has HK.AR influenced learning at your school? If so, how? In the district?

4. What are the strengths of HK.AR?

5. What are the challenges of HK.AR?

6. Has HK.AR influenced inter school transferability of report card marks? Why/why not?

7. Has HK.AR influenced communication at you school? How? What about at the district level?

8. Has HK.AR improved assessment and reporting practices in your school? In the district?

9. What changes need to occur to further improve assessment and reporting in your school? In the district?

Appendix E

Consent Form

As per the letter dated ___________________, I, _________________, am willing to participate in the study pertaining to the perceived effects of the revised reporting regulation, HK.AR, as described by the researcher.

I understand that this study is being conducted for the purposes of graduate studies and a thesis regarding the implications of HK.AR in the Edmonton Public School district.

I am aware that anonymity of names of teachers, administrators and schools will be respected throughout the study and its publication, and that I may opt out at any time for any given reason.

Signature_____________________________________

School _______________________________________

Date____

Appendix F
Interview Schedule: Guiding Questions

1. What are three strengths of the regulation HK.AR?

2. What are three weaknesses of the regulation HK.AR?

3. What are three effects of the regulation on students, teachers, administrators and parents?

4. What are three side effects resulting from the revision of the regulation?

5. What three revisions or changes to instruction, assessment and reporting might increase the effectiveness of communicating student growth within the district?

6. Are there revisions or changes to the regulation would increase the effectiveness of communicating student growth within the district?

Appendix G

Interview Schedule: Personal Copy

1.Educational Background: (Throw -Away Questions)

(i)How long have you worked with Edmonton Public Schools? In what kinds of roles?
(ii)How long have you worked in this school?
(iii)What kinds of roles have you had in the district?
(iv)How would you describe your role in this school?

2.Familiarity with HK.AR:

(i)How would you describe your level of familiarity with HK.AR?(Essential)
(ii)Has there been support (meetings, workshop training) to help you better understand HK.AR?(Extra)
(iii)Have you been involved in any committee work with the district, or at the school level, regarding assessing and reporting?(Extra)
(iv)Before continuing further, would you like some time to review the regulation?(Throw-Away)

3.Implementation of HK.AR:

(i)What is your school plan for assessing and reporting student growth?(Essential)
(ii)May I have a copy of your plan and a sample report card?(Extra)
(iii)What kind of experience did you have in implementing HK.AR?(Essential)
(iv)What kind of district support did you have in implementing HK.AR?(Extra)
(v)How did you implement the clauses pertaining to reporting?(Essential)
(vi)How did you implement the clauses pertaining to assessment?(Essential)
(vii)How were initial staff reactions to HK.AR?(Extra) And now?(Probe)

4.Influences on Teaching and Learning:

(i)Would you agree with the district philosophy that good assessment and reporting practices enhance student growth and improve student achievement? (Essential)
(ii)Has HK.AR influenced teaching in this school?(Essential) In the district?(Extra) If so, how? If not, explain.(Probe)
(iii)Has HK.AR influenced learning in this school?(Essential) In the district?(Extra) If so, how? If not, explain.(Probe)
(iv)Has HK.AR influenced communication in the district?(Essential)
(v)Has HK.AR influenced communication between the home and the school?(Probe) Amongst teachers or staff?(Probe) From school to school?(Probe) Anything/anywhere else?(Probe)
(vi)Is increased communication between the home and school perceived as having positive implications, or negative?(Extra) Why?(Probe) Could it be both?(Probe)
(vii)Has HK.AR fostered greater consistency in the transferability of marks from one school to another?(Essential) Why or why not?(Probe)

5.Strengths and Challenges of HK.AR:

(i) What are the strengths of HK.AR?(Essential)	-re: students(Probe) -re: teachers(Probe) -re: parents(Probe) -re: administrators(Probe)
(ii)What concerns do you have regarding HK.AR?(Essential)	-re: students(Probe) -re: teachers(Probe) -re: parents(Probe) -re: administrators(Probe)

6.Recommendations for change:

(i) Has HK.AR improved student assessment and reporting practices in the district?(Essential) At this school?(Extra)
(ii)How might the regulation be revised to further improve assessment and reporting in the district?(Essential) At this school?(Extra)
(iii)If you could make three recommendations to the district regarding HK.AR, or assessment and reporting in general, what would they be?(Essential)